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THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

VOLUME XIX NUMBER 2 NEW SERIES 1998

INAUGURAL LECTURE

Empathy and Evaluation in Medieval Church History and Pastoral Ministry:
A Lutheran Reading of Pseudo-Dionysius

PAUL ROREM

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The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years of Discovery
and Controversy

JAMES H. CHARLESWORTH

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Experience

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CONTENTS

INAUGURAL LECTURE

- Empathy and Evaluation in Medieval Church
History and Pastoral Ministry: A Lutheran
Reading of Pseudo-Dionysius

Paul Rorem 99

DEAD SEA SCROLLS SYMPOSIUM

- The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years of Discovery
and Controversy

James H. Charlesworth 116

- Qumran and Supersessionism—and the Road Not
Taken

Krister Stendahl 134

ALLEN CONFERENCE

- Theology and Spirituality: Or, Why Religion Is
Not Critical Reflection on Religious Experience

Eric O. Springsted 143

KUYPER CONFERENCE

- Some Reflections on Sphere Sovereignty

Richard J. Mouw 160

OPENING COMMUNION

- The Protection of God's Darkness

Janet L. Weathers 183

FACULTY PUBLICATIONS 1997

190

BOOK REVIEWS

- Covenant and Commitments: Faith, Family, and
Economic Life, by Max L. Stackhouse *William Johnson Everett* 201
- Religion, Feminism, and the Family, eds. Anne Carr and
Mary Stewart van Leeuwen *Christie Cozad Neuger* 203
- From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and
Law in the Western Tradition, by John Witte, Jr. *Bryan D. Spinks* 204
- Coming Out as Parents: You and Your Homosexual
Child, by David K. Switzer *Joretta L. Marshall* 206
- Discovering Images of God: Narratives of Care Among
Lesbians and Gays, by Larry Kent Graham *Peggy Way* 208
- The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible,
by Gail Corrington Streete *Christine Roy Yoder* 210
- Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute,
Advocacy, by Walter Brueggemann *Michael S. Moore* 212
- Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament, by Ernst
Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle *Brent A. Strawn* 215
- The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community,
Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction
to New Testament Ethics, by Richard B. Hays *Robin Scroggs* 217
- Matthew, by Thomas G. Long *A. K. M. Adam* 219
- The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern
Thinking About God Went Wrong,
by William C. Placher *Gregory S. Cootsona* 220
- Jesus Christ: Savior and Lord, by Donald G. Bloesch *Gabriel Fackre* 222
- Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First
Century, by Ada María Isasi-Díaz *Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi* 224
- Spokesmen for the Despised: Fundamentalist Leaders of
the Middle East, ed. R. Scott Appleby *Benjamin M. Weir* 225

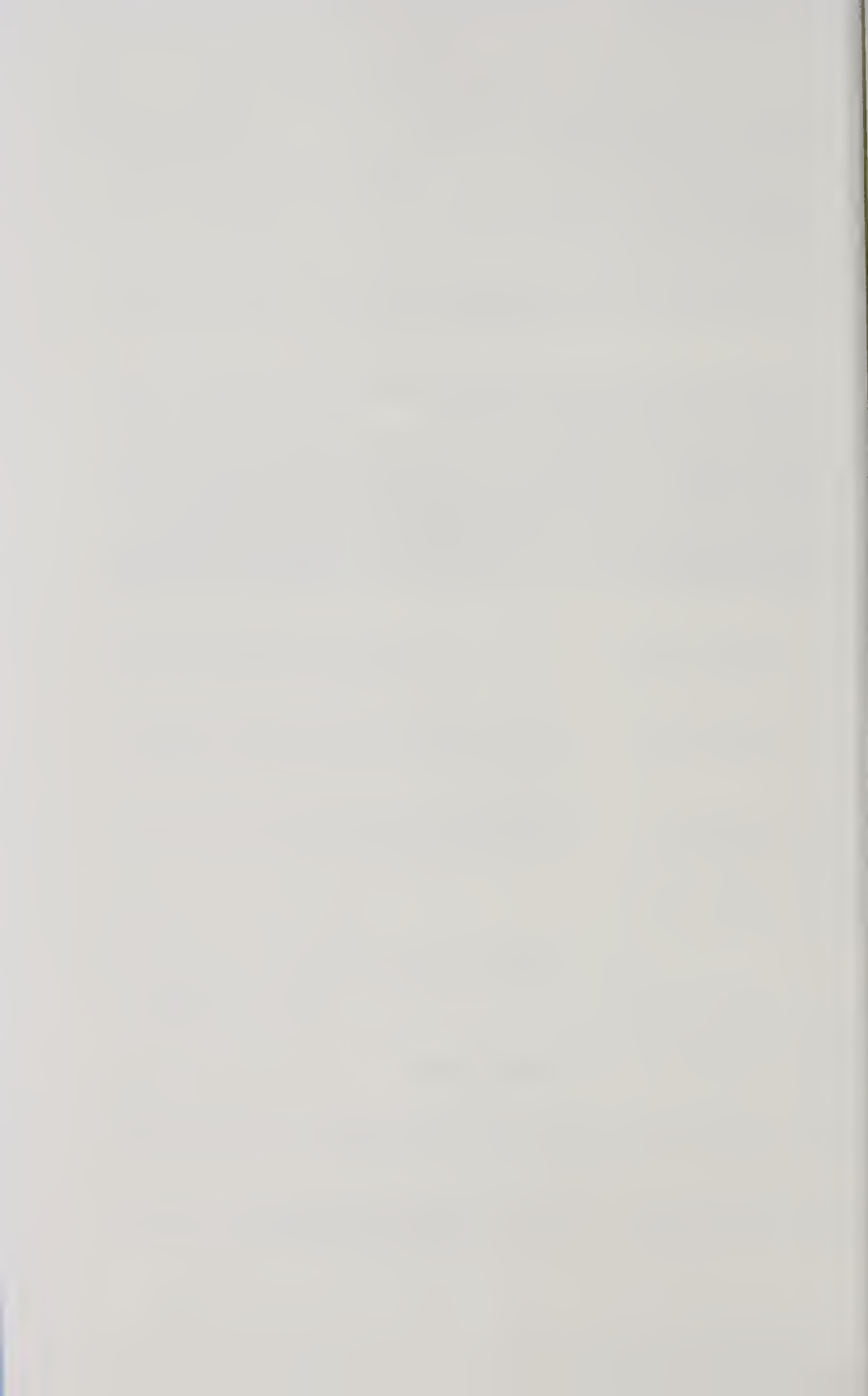
The Lawyer's Calling: Christian Faith and Legal Practice, by Joseph G. Allegretti	<i>Kelly D. Reese</i> 227
Making Gospel Sense to a Troubled Church, by James W. McClendon, Jr.	<i>Sally A. Brown</i> 229
Dancing with Disabilities: Opening the Church to All God's Children, by Brett Webb-Mitchell	<i>Rolf A. Jacobson</i> 231

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Empathy and Evaluation in Medieval Church History and Pastoral Ministry: A Lutheran Reading of Pseudo-Dionysius

by PAUL ROREM

Paul Rorem is the Benjamin B. Warfield Professor of Medieval Church History at Princeton Theological Seminary. He gave this inaugural address in Miller Chapel on March 25, 1998. Among his many works are Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence (1993) and John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite (forthcoming, 1998), co-authored with John C. Lamoreaux.

BENJAMIN BRECKINRIDGE WARFIELD maintains a noteworthy place on our campus, not only because of the annual lecture series that he endowed as a lasting expression of his profound devotion to his wife, and not only because of the imposing portrait dominating our Main Lounge, with its stern face and yet twinkling eyes. Warfield also holds a place in our midst because of his penetrating studies in the history of doctrine, particularly of St. Augustine and of John Calvin. Many have cited his observation that “the Reformation, inwardly considered, was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine’s doctrine of grace over Augustine’s doctrine of the church.”¹ Warfield identified Augustine’s soteriology as profound and true, and he evaluated Augustinian ecclesiology as inherited and secondary, even to Augustine himself.

Regarding previous Warfield professors, I have had the privilege of being a student in the classrooms of both of them, namely, Hugh T. Kerr and Karlfried Froehlich.² From Professor Kerr I learned how to look, rather boldly, for an author’s overall theological system, how to enjoy and benefit from the arts within the seminary curriculum, and even how to help students meet and appreciate each other. I also found out that seminary professors can have fun at their work and even be funny, although few will ever match Tim Kerr on that score. From Professor Froehlich, I learned about most of church history, including Lutheran “polity” as we say at Princeton, meaning the

¹ For insights into Warfield himself, I am indebted to William O. Harris, Seminary Librarian for Archives, especially for his transcription of Hugh Kerr’s first Warfield lecture, “Warfield: The Person Behind the Theology” (March 1, 1982; Seminary Archives). Warfield’s epigram in *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 322, is used by J. Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 9 and elsewhere, and is discussed in Pelikan’s “An Augustinian Dilemma: Augustine’s Doctrine of Grace vs. Augustine’s Doctrine of the Church?” *Augustinian Studies* 18 (1987), 1–29.

² On Kerr, see *Our Life in God’s Light*, ed. John M. Mulder (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979); on Froehlich, see *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective*, ed. Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

Lutheran Confessions, about Pseudo-Dionysian studies and the necessary background material, and thus about some of the basic methodological perspectives that I intend to explore in this essay. As my *Doktorvater*, he directed my dissertation, has helped to guide my work ever since, and remains a cherished adviser and family friend.

I. MEDIEVAL CHURCH HISTORY

Medieval church history, the study of the entire millennium before the Western Latin Church subdivided into the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches, has much to teach us about both content and method, the latter of which is my primary emphasis. In particular, I want to relate certain methodological questions in medieval church history to the context of parish ministry. The mission of this seminary is, obviously and officially, to prepare women and men for ministries in congregations and in the larger church. My correlation of methods in church history to ministry in the church will emphasize congregational life, the face-to-face communities of weekly worship, witness, and work. More specifically still, I will speak of what I know, namely, medieval church history and the solo pastorate, for I have found these two sides of my own vocation to employ a similar method, the interplay of what I am here calling empathy and evaluation.

To study church history, in general, means to investigate widely rather than narrowly. We may have favorite authors or cherished doctrines; we may prefer certain eras or areas, but to do church history is to take a broad perspective, a holistic approach to the whole of the church, as we are able, far beyond our own likes and dislikes, just as pastors need a holistic view of the entire congregation. One could even choose materials for special investigation that are not naturally congenial, indeed even alien or opposed to one's own inclinations and convictions. For some, the whole subject of medieval church history might fall under this category of the alien and the strange. Yet a closer look shows some familiar names and materials that are naturally a part of our seminary education and church life. Postponing the general questions of method for a moment, the contents of medieval church history are plainly pertinent to theological formation, ecumenical and interfaith relationships, and the practice of parish ministry. In terms of the history of doctrine, there is Warfield's own comment on the legacy of St. Augustine; Bernard of Clairvaux was a favorite of Calvin and of some Calvinists, while Anselm was a favorite of Barth and some Barthians. Ministers today can learn much from the medieval record about the relationships of Eastern and Western Christians, and the interaction of Christianity in general with Judaism and Islam. The medieval

mystical tradition is often studied these days for its contributions to the growth industry of spirituality, and even Gregorian chant and angelology have had their recent moments of popularity. Perhaps Latin itself will enjoy a renaissance, especially if graduates want to read their own diplomas!

In parish life, I have found regular application for two medieval subjects. First, many of the hymns already well known on the congregational level come from medieval church history. "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded," attributed to St. Bernard, is dear to Lutheran and Reformed traditions alike, and was translated by Princeton Seminary's own James Alexander in 1830. Second, we can learn much from the Middle Ages about the leadership of women in the church. For starters, the flexibility of many medieval authors in using male and female imagery for God and the soul can increase our own capacity for a wider variety of symbolic language.³ There are also many more specific models for church leadership among medieval women than even the hopeful might have guessed a few years ago. When I first announced my course, "Women Leaders of the Medieval Church," a colleague (elsewhere) remarked facetiously, "Oh, all four of them? That'll be a short course!" The number of medieval women who can now be studied in English translation for their specific forms of leadership in church life is not four or fourteen but almost forty in my files alone, and growing rapidly. There are enduring models for ministry here, such as this description of Gertrude of Hackeborn's ministry as Abbess of Helfta: "[S]he was gentle and indulgent with the little ones, holy and discreet with the young, wise and kind with the old."⁴ Different age groups do suggest different pastoral approaches, and Mother Gertrude's example is a splendid model for parish pastors. Gertrude models an awareness of the situation and perspective of the other person, which previews my theme of empathy, both in pastoral work and in historical study.

My real emphasis here is not on the content but on the methods of medieval church history as they pertain to parish ministry. One could see the lighter side of the similarities between these two domains: More than one pastor has pejoratively labeled congregational politics "Byzantine"; both medievalists and pastors have to cope with horrible handwriting and undated documents; and, of course, in the Middle Ages and in any parish, you meet the most peculiar people. More seriously, both historians and pastors are responsible

³ On this point, I was pleased to contribute to Princeton Seminary's collegial collection of essays an article entitled "Lover and Mother: Medieval Language for God and the Soul," in *Women, Gender, and Christian Community*, eds. Jane Dempsey Douglass and James F. Kay (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 46-65.

⁴ Mechthild of Hackeborn, *Le Livre de la Grâce Spéciale*, 6.1.361-63, as cited in Mary J. Finnegan, *The Women of Helfta: Scholars and Mystics* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1991), 11.

for the broad sweep of church life, for all the individual people in their purview, including the odd ones. Neither the medievalist nor the pastor can simply select her favorite themes or programs, the people or the type of people he likes best. A holistic approach must prevail in both church history and parish ministry, relating well to different age groups as Mother Gertrude did and to different people in their individuality. Perhaps, instead of evaluating others as the odd ones, in hearing and learning from them—medieval authors and/or parishioners—we may learn to re-evaluate our own peculiarities. To put it in terms of the dangers involved, both historians and pastors run the risk of associating themselves mostly with what is already familiar and known, and known to be congenial and appealing, reinforcing what we already know and like. By projecting our established categories and preferences outward, we attempt to create a world to our own liking. To invite only our friends and relatives to the table, rather than the stranger, is to court stagnation and sterility. Closed in on ourselves, we would be trapped in our past experiences and formation, closed to the future, to change, to the other. A larger view is needed.

When this past year's M.Div. graduates were Juniors, I divulged to them the secret to medieval church history, indeed to all of church history. They seemed so eager to know this secret that I further confessed that it was the key to all of theology and to ministry itself. The secret to church history, to theology, and to ministry is that everything has to do, and here I quoted my own college professor, with everything else. "Everything is connected to everything else" became an unofficial class motto for some of them, and was used as the title of their video of reflections upon graduation. This larger view of the relatedness of all things, a coherence to all of life, was a characteristic of medieval Christian culture, with an ancestry in the Stoic and Neoplatonic view of *sympatheia*. It has guided my own assumption that in ministry everything, from preaching to administration to evangelism, has to do with everything else, from stewardship to youth work to social ministry, both locally and globally. In its Enlightenment form regarding the unity of all knowledge, the assumption of coherence has come in for a sharp postmodern critique, as well as the current defense by Edward O. Wilson under the category of "consilience."⁵ In any case, pragmatically speaking, it allows us to look for connections not only between subjects, but between ourselves as pastors and our parishioners, between ourselves as historians and the people

⁵ Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Knopf, 1998), as excerpted in "Back from Chaos," *The Atlantic Monthly* 281 (1998), 41–62.

studied, indeed among ourselves as colleagues and as fellow human beings sharing this world's history.

An obvious point of common ground between historical studies and parish ministry is the importance of congregational history, especially for the new pastor. James Hopewell's influential book, *Congregation: Stories and Structures*, speaks of narrative, story, and plot in order to understand the local congregation, and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale has provided a more thorough method of "congregational exegesis."⁶ All of this pertains to doing effective congregational history, which must itself be understood as part of the larger story of neighborhood and community history as well as denominational history. The pastor must therefore be a historian, but what methods or principles should inform this type of church history? The congregation's history is also influenced by the stories, the histories of the individual members, past and present. Here, too, the pastor becomes a historian of these specific people in their family histories, both the likable like-minded ones and also those who are plainly different from the pastor, perhaps in fundamental ways, seeming to be alien and strange. Here, too, we have a pastoral responsibility to get to know them, especially across cultures and skin colors and differences of age or gender. But how? What many pastors do by intuition, perhaps aided by some cross-cultural experience, is in fact a methodological challenge for all historians, namely, getting to know the other, especially the strange or completely different. In a way, such listening is more difficult for historians, for we must give a voice to texts that are mute lines on a silent page. Yet both pastors and historians operate with an implicit interplay of what I will call empathy and evaluation.

II. EMPATHY

Although the term "empathy" is of recent origin, coined only a century ago, it is already thoroughly embedded in a wide variety of scholarly disciplines—psychology, philosophy, anthropology, comparative religions, and theology.⁷ For my purposes here, a straightforward starting point is the

⁶ James F. Hopewell, *Congregation: Stories and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), especially 56–90. Here and elsewhere the categories of participant and observer, insider and outsider, parallel and enrich my understanding of empathy and evaluation.

⁷ See, for example, Lauren Wispé, "Sympathy and Empathy," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* 15 (1968), 441–7. The term's broad reception stems from the antiquity of the idea, as seen in the cognates "sympathy" and "compassion." See Gary L. Sapp, ed., *Compassionate Ministry* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1993), especially "Compassion in the Bible," by Dianne Bergant (9–34) and "Compassion in Theology," by Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. (35–63).

dictionary definition, namely, Webster's: Empathy is "the capacity for participation in another's feelings or ideas." Such participation is only partial, however, lest we presume too much. This kind of empathy, the imaginative projection of oneself into another person's thought world, is part of our common sense and everyday expression: Walk a mile in my shoes, look at it from her point of view, imagine that you were there. Yet the notion of empathy has special application to the work of historians and pastors. This goes beyond the ability of debaters to take either side of an argument; it means approximating another person's perspective, whether across the centuries or across the room. "Role-taking" is one of the specialized meanings of empathy in the social sciences, one of the basic capacities involved in pastoral counseling, and a familiar way to teach church history.⁸ Historical studies such as biographies naturally involve empathy, and sometimes quite imaginatively so, although preferably disciplined by the evidence available.

In his inaugural lecture, Peter Brown invited students to read books "that widen our sympathies, that train us to imagine with greater precision what it is like to be human in situations very different from our own."⁹ If Brown calls for historians with "widened hearts and deeper sympathies," the seminary study of church history should certainly aim at a similar result in those who will minister to others. "Connected knowing" is another way to speak of empathetic listening. *Women's Ways of Knowing* quotes a college student as saying, about a medieval book in fact, "You shouldn't read a book just as something printed and distant from you, but as a real experience of someone who went through some sort of situation."¹⁰ The use of a general understanding of empathy, rather than a technical and specialized meaning, is supported by a British study, "Empathy and the Teaching of History," which cautions against an ambitious definition of empathy at this point. It is wiser and safer, in the teaching task, to use the more limited and general meaning of trying to understand another person's point of view.¹¹

⁸ A generation of PTS students may remember the modest role-playing exercise in CH101 regarding the Chalcedonian christological controversies. For a fuller form of role-playing, see Peter C. Matheson, "The Teaching of Church History," *Pacifica* 3 (1990), 251-6.

⁹ Peter Brown, "Learning and Imagination," in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), 4. Brown's particular ways of embodying these values and of cultivating them in his students have remained formative for my own classroom efforts ever since I was privileged to be his teaching assistant one semester at Princeton University.

¹⁰ Mary Field Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 113; see the entire chapter on "Separate and Connected Knowing" (100-30 and elsewhere) for insights pertinent to empathy and evaluation.

¹¹ Tony Boddington, "Empathy and the Teaching of History," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 28 (1980), 13-19. See also the other studies cited there.

My major example here is a Lutheran reading of Pseudo-Dionysius, my own effort to understand the texts of the Dionysian corpus, out of a time and place and point of view so different from my own. How would someone even choose a mouthful like "Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite" in the first place? My friend and colleague Kathleen McVey, who served on the committee that approved my own dissertation, once made a personal introduction that may help illustrate this question of a research specialization. During a Chicago meeting of the American Society of Church History, Dr. McVey introduced me to a friend and colleague of hers, a prominent scholar in early church history whose editing of major reference tools is known to all. I was honored to meet him, and especially delighted when he said to me, "Well, I am pleased to meet the man who knows more about Pseudo-Dionysius"—and here, of course, my ego perked up, but he went on—"than could possibly be good for one's soul."

Perhaps most professors know more about some narrow field than is good for their souls. On the one hand, church historians are necessarily generalists, seeing the whole story of the church as best we can in all its diversity and complexity. On the other hand, we do specialize, and often narrowly so, in order to contribute to the concrete particulars of the story. In historical studies, we encounter the unfamiliar and the unknown, usually to our professional and personal benefit, even if a topic may seem alien or even dangerous. Is there something about this Pseudo-Dionysius in particular that might not be good for one's soul? If one thinks so, how would such a critical evaluation inform one's historical method? How would such a strong criticism relate to the empathy or respectful listening that is necessary for the historian to hear and know what this, or any, author really had to say?

Now, this "Dionysius" is not exactly a household word, not even in my house, although seminarian baby-sitters in Chicago took some delight in teaching our pre-school Annie to pronounce, slowly, "Pseudo-Dionysius." But for centuries, the writings attributed to the biblical Dionysius (Acts 17) were granted immense authority in Christian theology, philosophy, and church life, even though it turned out that they were written not by an apostolic disciple of St. Paul, but by an otherwise unknown Neoplatonic philosopher-theologian in the early sixth century. His *Celestial Hierarchy* provided the Christian tradition with its major treatise on angels and with a theology of aesthetics that has been credited—perhaps mistakenly—with inspiring the first Gothic church, Saint-Denis in Paris. His *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* shaped some views of clerical offices and worship rites, including a method of liturgical allegory. Even the word "hierarchy" was of his own coinage, influencing monarchical polity ever since, both royal and episcopal.

The Divine Names provided a thorough rationale for using every biblical name for God, even while recognizing that no name is adequate and that therefore the apophatic way of negations is most suited to the transcendent God. Culminating all of this, *The Mystical Theology* (another phrase, like "cloud of unknowing," that originates in this corpus) guided the readers upward toward the transcendent God, who is finally unknown and beyond names, in an anagogical or uplifting spirituality of mystical ascent to and into the Godhead, as appreciated and appropriated by various Christian mystics.¹² An impressive array of influential writings indeed, and all in a small corpus. It is furthermore a formidable challenge to discern the inter-relationships of angelology, aesthetics, liturgy, hierarchy, apophatic theology, and mysticism. Yet it is precisely this last legacy, the ascent to union with the transcendent God, that is harmful to one's soul, at least in Martin Luther's reading of Dionysius.

I was first introduced to Dionysius by way of Luther's own sharp critique in *The Babylonian Captivity*:

Indeed, to speak more boldly, it greatly displeases me to assign such importance to this Dionysius, whoever he may have been, for he shows hardly any signs of solid learning. . . . But in his *Theology* which is rightly called *Mystical*, of which certain very ignorant theologians make so much, he is downright dangerous, for he is more of a Platonist than a Christian. So if I had my way, no believing soul would give the least attention to these books. So far, indeed, from learning Christ in them, you will lose even what you already know of him.¹³

Harmful to one's soul indeed! For Luther, to attempt an ascent to the transcendent God without going through the incarnation and cross of Christ is to court the ultimate danger.¹⁴ And yet I, disregarding Luther's warning to pay no attention, have spent decades on these books. I was introduced to Dionysius so that I might know the enemy, and the entire approach originally was that of critique.¹⁵ But then I came to Princeton and found that a rigorous

¹² On these treatises and related bibliography, see my *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹³ Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity*, in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., eds. J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955-), 36:109. Hereafter cited as LW.

¹⁴ Cf. Luther's 1516 Romans lectures (LW 25:287): "This also applies to those who follow the mystical theology and struggle in inner darkness, omitting all pictures of Christ's suffering, wishing to hear and contemplate only the uncreated Word Himself, but not having first been justified and purged in the eyes of their heart through the incarnate Word"

¹⁵ Since it was my college and seminary mentor, Oliver K. Olson, who first introduced me to the Dionysian corpus by way of Luther's critique, I was pleased to revisit that material as

study of these or any texts required first of all not doctrinal evaluation but historical empathy or at least a careful hearing.

Enemy or not, how did I know what the Dionysian corpus really had to say without a thorough reading? Translations aside, what did these texts really have to say, in their context? Why this or that expression, this or that emphasis? With such methodological questions, Professor Froehlich drew me deeper and deeper into the texts themselves, closer and closer to the author's own mindset, although always with the caution not to conclude too much, especially when it came to motives for the pseudonymous authorship. Thus, should empathy replace evaluation, for a time: Could I suspend the theological criticism in order to hear and understand what this Dionysius had to say? Could I appreciate the historical context enough to enter into that perspective even partially and see things the way this author did, or at least try to do so? Even a non-technical or common sense understanding of empathy leaves the historian with a formidable challenge; in my case, how could a twentieth-century American, and a Lutheran at that, empathize with a sixth-century Neoplatonic philosopher-theologian, indeed one who concealed his real identity behind a very effective pseudonym?

The answer, of course, was to live with these texts, not to visit them like a busy tourist who looks for a souvenir quotation and who comes home unchanged, but rather to live there a while, adapting myself to the local language, the thoughts and values, eventually returning not armed with a choice quip but myself changed in perspective.¹⁶ The challenge was to abide with the texts, to ponder them individually and in their obscure relations to each other, to experience their performative power sometimes out loud, to puzzle over the prefixes and suffixes, the tangled logic of double and triple negatives, the made-up words since become ordinary but once odd and fresh, like "hierarchy" and "supernatural." The context of Neoplatonic and patristic thought was necessary background, and so were the several, largely unsuccessful efforts to translate this corpus into various modern languages. The ideas were just plain hard to fathom, and that challenged me. What intrigued me

part of the tribute to his career. For fuller citations of Luther's comments, and for an argument that his critique was previewed in some earlier authors, see that Festschrift essay "Martin Luther's Christocentric Critique of Pseudo-Dionysian Spirituality," *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (1997), 291-307.

¹⁶ The obvious parallels with cross-cultural travel suggest not only historical empathy but also its inverse, that "temporal distancing" in everyday speech that labels some of our own contemporaries as primitive, archaic, aboriginal, or—to use examples from above—medieval or Byzantine. See the penetrating critique of some anthropologists in Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), especially 16 and 152.

and invited me further and further into this thought world was the challenge to my assumption of coherence: Did Neoplatonic philosophy, biblical exegesis, liturgical interpretation, angels, hierarchy, the apophatic, and the mystical all hold together in this one dense and brief corpus? Assuming that they might, I determined to investigate how. The challenge was sufficiently daunting, and therefore intriguing, that I could set aside for a time the original critique and the sense of opposition.

Then I realized that there was something appealing about this pernicious Platonist after all: The Dionysian corpus eloquently acknowledges the inexpressible transcendence of God, the ineffable infinity of the divine. "We offer worship to that of the divine which lies hidden beyond thought and beyond being. With a wise silence we do honor to the inexpressible."¹⁷ This acknowledgment is common to many authors with a shared biblical background: the "Unknown God" of Acts 17 that introduces St. Paul's encounter with the Athenians, including the real Dionysius; St. John's Prologue, "No one has ever seen God"; and St. Paul's various uses of the language of mystery. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it" (Psalm 139:6); and many theologians prudently stop there, having glimpsed the abyss of divine infinity. But the Dionysian author stays on the edge of transcendence, audaciously straining language and thought, resorting finally to negations and silence, all in the effort to point beyond ourselves, our best words and highest thoughts, to something wholly other, the *Mysterium tremendum*. My earliest religious memory was the awe and the terror at the thought of eternity, even in heaven. Infinity not only baffles but frightens the finite, and the wonder is that we can glimpse it at all. (Perhaps that we can have a sense of the infinite and eternal, the perfect and truly transcendent, helps explain the enduring appeal of Anselm's so-called ontological argument for the existence of God.) The Dionysian corpus charts a way toward the transcendent, an apophatic way of negations or denials to approach the divine Other.

Yet here we face the dilemma of transcendence, as Michael Sells calls it, the "original aporia of ineffability."¹⁸ How can we think about the ineffable, how can we speak of that which is beyond our words? The historian of mysticism faces a double challenge, as so poetically and powerfully articulated by Michel de Certeau. To seek and to find and to hear the historical other, those from

¹⁷ *The Divine Names* 1, translation revised from *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 50. Further quotations from the Dionysian corpus will be cited by treatise, chapter, and page number from this translation.

¹⁸ Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 211: "The paradoxes and contradictions of apophatic language proceed logically from the original aporia of ineffability."

the past who may stay forever other and unknowable, is daunting enough for any historian; but to find and to hear those who are seeking and straining to express their encounter with the divine Other, the transcendent one who is ultimately the Unknown, this is the challenge facing the historian of mysticism: "the other" twice removed, or "otherness" squared.¹⁹

It may be a double challenge, but it requires the same method, the empathetic listening that historians and pastors have in common. A colleague elsewhere who teaches church history out of his own experience as a parish pastor gives at least one assignment with these explicit instructions: "In reading this text as historians, have some respect for the words of the dead; you may learn to listen more carefully to the words of the living as their pastor." This commonality of method may sound obvious, and part of it is indeed intuitive and self-evident to some, but it is worth examining directly, especially in its relationship to evaluation.

III. EMPATHY AND EVALUATION

This empathetic listening, this attention to the texts and hearing of the parishioner, must not become idolatry, as if we only need to accept the perspective of the other, historically or pastorally, as the final word. When the historian is also a theologian, when the pastor is also a theologian, we hear the other within a larger framework, one that allows for, indeed requires, evaluation, both of the other and of ourselves. After all the careful listening, and the reasonable confidence that we have in fact heard the other, then what? Alongside empathy, there is also evaluation, which can bring another perspective to the subject. Theologically speaking, church historians and pastors do not listen in a vacuum, but in the context of commitments, confessions, creeds, and—ultimately—the canon of Scripture. Finally, the Word of God shapes our listening, our empathy, and especially our evaluation. I and the other are both created by the Word and stand under the divine Word of judgment and grace that comes to us both from beyond ourselves. When the other, whether historical subject or parish context, is evaluated in one's theological terms, empathy may yield to critique.

In pastoral counseling, the pitfalls of empathy by itself are well known, as in

¹⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, Volume 1: *The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 11: "Thus it is that the historian of the mystics, summoned, as they are, to *say the other*, repeats their experience in studying it: an exercise of absence defines at once the operation by which he produces his text and that which constructed theirs." See also de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) and "Mystic Speech," in *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 80–100.

the very title of Ralph Underwood's book *Empathy and Confrontation in Pastoral Care*:

By listening, pastors adapt themselves to others. When this posture is not balanced by challenging persons to consider others' perspectives, it runs the risk of encouraging people to idolize their own self-understanding.²⁰

Pastors need to provide another perspective, one from beyond ourselves, both in counseling and in preaching. Particularly in preaching, and not always from favorite texts but from the whole cycle of seasons or biblical books, pastors place the hearers and themselves under the power of the biblical proclamation. When the pastor brings the whole membership, both favorites and opponents, into a relationship with the whole range of the biblical message, then empathy and evaluation contribute to transformation, and a whole congregation moves forward together to follow God's will. Then, parish ministry is rich and full and deeply satisfying.

Of course the art of it is knowing when to move from empathy to evaluation, from connected knowing to separate knowing.²¹ As a pastor, I often stayed too long with empathy, and was too slow to offer another perspective. Are we perhaps reluctant to evaluate openly lest we seem to be judgmental and thus incur the disfavor of the flock? On the other hand, as a theologian doing historical studies, I have often been too quick to evaluate and even criticize instead of staying patiently with empathy. Perhaps it is easier to be critical of the absent dead who cannot respond? Our seminary classrooms should both deepen the capacities of empathy and evaluation and also develop an agility to use both capacities in the right measure and at the right time. To complicate the situation, our evaluative frameworks do not simply descend from above but rather develop over time according to various influences, including our careful listening to others. Yesterday's empathetic considerations have shaped today's evaluative standards. Listening carefully to Martin Luther first would no doubt shape almost anyone's evaluation of Dionysius.

²⁰ Ralph L. Underwood, *Empathy and Confrontation in Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 92. Cf. 121: "In many situations, true ministry in the name and spirit of Christ involves a balancing of empathy and confrontation that enables persons to transcend their situations." Although the title suggests an aggressive (perhaps intentionally anti-Rogerian) tone, Underwood's method highlights the theme of respect, which leads to both empathy and confrontation.

²¹ That empathy should precede evaluation is assumed. Cf. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 29: "The will to give ourselves to others and 'welcome' them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity." See further the entire chapter (4) on "Embrace."

To return to the example of my own Dionysian studies, I was persuaded to set aside my theological critique as best I could, and to attempt an empathetic interpretation. Having lived with the Dionysian texts for years, seeking to understand their inner coherence and thrust, I have presented my interpretations as sympathetically as I could. My own evaluation of the Dionysian enterprise as a Lutheran theologian has been explicitly set aside as irrelevant to many of my readers. One appreciative reviewer wrote that my presentation was an occasion for some ecumenical hope, since "the ecclesiastical tradition from which he springs has been the least sympathetic to the doctrine of St. Dionysius, apart from the Calvinist."²² On the other hand, a very close reading of my work prompted another Dionysian scholar to conclude that it was my Lutheran orientation that led me to approach the Areopagite

rather in the way that we might examine, say, a banded coral snake: it is dry, muscular, quite beautiful, and absolutely lethal. The book's message might therefore be summed up as a kind of warning. Look, in other words, but for Christ's sake—literally—don't touch the brute.²³

Father Golitzin's identification of my theological evaluation, even the specific reference to Christ, is rather perceptive, although I hope that he owes this insight more to our twenty years of friendly conversations rather than to inferences from my published work. In any case, this is the occasion to share more of my theological perspective on the Dionysian corpus, at least as an illustration of the interplay between empathy and evaluation.

After all this time living with the text, listening empathetically and from the inside, so to speak, what should be said in theological evaluation when stepping back and looking at it from the outside? Space does not permit a complete report, but the heart of it starts with the very emphasis identified above as attractive: the recognition of God's transcendence. The apophatic method, in the Areopagite and others, works from the biblical insight that God is ultimately other, beyond all our names and notions. But then what?

Since negative theology is not monolithic, several varieties need to be identified in order to situate my critical evaluation of the Dionysian version. The apophatic has several different applications, at least four: First, negative theology may be used to qualify all our names for God, indeed to destabilize all language about God, such that all knowledge of God becomes relative and strictly a matter of private preference and experience. This modern, or postmodern, isolation of the apophatic insight from its larger context is not at

²² Wayne J. Hankey, "[Review of] *Pseudo-Dionysius*," *Augustinianum* 34 (1994), 515.

²³ Alexander Golitzin, "Review Essay," *Mystics Quarterly* 21 (1995), 30.

all Dionysian, and should not be charged or credited to the Areopagite's account. It results in a nihilistic relativism without substantial precedent in all of Christian theology.²⁴ Second, negative theology can undergird the spiritual teaching that the search for God is itself infinite, that we are forever going beyond our current knowledge. "More is always being grasped," said Gregory of Nyssa, "and yet something beyond that which has been grasped will always be discovered, and this search will never overtake its Object."²⁵ When Moses saw only God's back, according to Gregory, it was because he was following where God was leading, ever deeper into the divine mystery and never fully seeing God face to face. Although well represented in the history of Christian teaching, not only in Gregory but also in William of St. Thierry, this too is not the Dionysian use of the apophatic.

Third, and for the Areopagite, the apophatic method—the right use of negations and silence—leads to union with God. To separate ourselves by way of denials from everything, every name and idea, that is not God, is to find ourselves in God, the God beyond God as Meister Eckhart put it centuries later. From Dionysius' *The Divine Names*: "The way up through negations stands the soul outside everything which is correlative with its own finite nature" bringing it "into union with God himself." When the Areopagite glimpsed the abyss, he did not retreat; with the right use of the apophatic and silence, the abyss is overcome and one is transported over into God. "In the darkness of unknowing . . . one is supremely united to the completely unknown [God] by an inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing."²⁶ As Moses climbed Mt. Sinai, so negations are here footholds on the mountainous mystery of the divine. Etymologically speaking, a mystic is myopic, squinting and blinking; the Dionysian mystic closes the eyes to meet God in the darkness of eye and mind.

In a fourth use of negative theology, the transcendence of God is also fully and humbly acknowledged, but the eyes of the mystic are not so much closed as diverted, or averted from the blinding majesty of God's essence to the

²⁴ For some of the issues in the postmodern (and Neo-Thomist) interest in Dionysius, see Wayne J. Hankey, "Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot," forthcoming in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, eds. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (London: Routledge, 1998), 139–84. See also the essays in *Negation and Theology*, ed. Robert Scharlemann (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992).

²⁵ See Deirdre Carabine, "Gregory of Nyssa on the Incomprehensibility of God," in *The Relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity*, eds. Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (Dublin: Four Courts, 1992), 79–99, here (98) quoting *Contra Eun.* I, 291, 112 (15–20). For more on this theme, under the terminology of "epektasis," see Bernard McGinn's masterful multi-volume *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, especially Volume 2: *The Growth of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994).

²⁶ *The Divine Names* 13 (130); *The Mystical Theology* 1 (137).

revelation of God incarnate in the economy of salvation. The apophatic can and—over against the Dionysian mode—should serve the incarnational. In Acts, Paul's sermon began with the "Unknown God" of the Athenian altar and ended with the one raised from the dead. "No one has ever seen God," says the Prologue to John, but, continues that very verse, "It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (1:18). St. Paul's use of the language of mystery identifies that which has been hidden but is now revealed, the mystery that is Christ, "the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself" (Col. 2:2). This fourth and christological use of negative theology is to lead the faithful away from the unfathomable mystery of God's essence and toward the incarnation of God in Christ, indeed in Christ crucified. This clear linkage of the apophatic and the incarnation is missing in the Dionysian corpus, which moves directly and wrongly from negations in general to silent union with the infinite God. Yet this fourth application of the *via negativa* is the way John of Scythopolis and especially Maximus the Confessor interpreted the Areopagite, not so much by way of critique as by supplement. Recent and detailed studies of Maximus show his persistent preference for a christological and incarnational use of the apophatic, both in his own system and in his interpretations of the Dionysian corpus.²⁷ It was Maximus' emphasis on the incarnation that was echoed much later by Bonaventure and then by Martin Luther, albeit with a more explicit critique of "that Dionysius, whoever he was," and with a tighter focus on Christ crucified. Explicitly attacking the so-called Areopagite and distilling an orthodox commitment to the incarnation down to the passion and death of Christ, Luther says, "If we wish to give a true definition of 'negative theology,' we should say that it is the holy cross."²⁸

What John Meyendorff called the "christological corrective" of Dionysius

²⁷ Cf. *Chapters on Knowledge* II, 76; in *Maximus the Confessor, Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 164: "The knowledge of himself in his essence and personhood remains inaccessible to all angels and men alike and he can in no way be known by anyone. But St. John, initiated as perfectly as humanly possible into the meaning of the Word's incarnation, claims that he has seen the glory of the Word as flesh, that is, he saw the reason or the plan for which God became man, full of grace and truth." See also the recent volume by Andrew Louth that introduces and illustrates the theme of "Christology as the Convergence of Apophatic and Cataphatic Theology": *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), especially 52–4; and Louth's 1997 Paine Lectures, *Wisdom of the Byzantine Church, Evagrius of Pontus and Maximus the Confessor*, ed. Jill Raitt (Columbia, Missouri: Department of Religious Studies, 1998).

²⁸ LW 13:110–111; see the fuller documentation of Luther and references to other precedents beyond Maximus in Rorem, "Martin Luther's Christocentric Critique of Pseudo-Dionysian Spirituality." Among modern christological applications of the apophatic tradition, see Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 334–5.

by the orthodox tradition, can also be applied to a host of corollaries to the doctrine of the incarnation, mostly to do with human embodiment in general. The Areopagite took a minimal interest in the bodily and the earthly—the here and now of humanity's embodiment as male and female, for example—being strikingly quiet on everything to do with women, whether deaconesses or Mary herself. (It is fitting that the corpus that ignored women is itself mostly ignored by medieval women authors, especially the mystics!) Even the doctrines of creation and sacramental realism have been criticized in the Dionysian corpus, all related to the author's minimal interest in embodiment in space and time.

This critical evaluation of the Dionysian system at the point of the incarnation overlaps finally with the theme of empathy, for Christ is the supreme divine empathy with the human condition of embodiment, not only identifying with us loosely speaking, but actually becoming one of us.²⁹ Empathy may be a modern word, but its cognate "sympathy" has an incarnational application in Hebrews: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin" (4:15). Our empathy for historical subjects, congregational members, or each other as colleagues and friends in this common calling of seminary life, begins in the larger context of the Word made flesh. And our empathy finally includes mutual evaluation in this larger context of God's own supreme empathy, suffering not only with us but also for us.

The incarnation of Christ, the union of the divine and the human, began not with the birth of Jesus, but with his conception in the Virgin Mary, which we celebrate on this very day, March 25, as the Feast of the Annunciation of our Lord. Others may call this timing coincidental, but not a Warfield professor, for whom it can only be providential! Perhaps I may also be permitted a Lutheran fondness for the possibility that the original dating of the Annunciation and the conception of Jesus on March 25 resulted not from counting backwards from his birth on December 25 but rather from matching the beginning of Jesus' earthly life with the ending on the cross, believed to be dated on March 25. In that case, the conception and therefore the birth nine months later in December, the Annunciation and the Nativity as the twin feasts of the incarnation, are both dated from the final expression of Christ's

²⁹ Edward Farley's *Divine Empathy: A Theology of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) is not as tightly focused on the historical incarnation as is my usage here of the phrase "divine empathy," but his wide-ranging theological discussion provides a larger context for it. The basic point about empathy and the incarnation was made a generation ago by Thomas C. Oden, *Kerygma and Counseling* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), especially chapter 2.

mortality among us and suffering for us, the crucifixion itself. Ultimately all our work as theologians, whether historical or pastoral or otherwise, even this afternoon's occasion, finds its significance and satisfaction in the larger context of God's own empathy with us in the incarnation, that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years of Discovery and Controversy

by JAMES H. CHARLESWORTH

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I. OF ORIGINS AND SCROLLS

ORIGINS ARE fundamental. The main reason the Dead Sea Scrolls seem to be so fascinating, and to so many, is because they throw rare and illuminating light on the origins of our culture and our faith—on the beginnings of so-called Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. On the one hand, we now recognize that much of what often had been reconstructed about pre-70 C.E. Judaism is inaccurate. On the other hand, today we are merely on the threshold of synthesizing the knowledge we now possess in a new and more informed attempt to re-present the world of Hillel and Jesus.

Origins, unfortunately, are often hidden in the mists of place and time. For example, it is well known that Muhammed Ed-Dib discovered the first cave at Qumran fifty years ago in 1947. But who is (or was) he? In March of 1997, the American Center for Oriental Research's *Newzette* reported that he had "died two years ago." Over three months after this obituary, however, I was introduced to an Arab who claimed to be Muhammed Ed-Dib. He explained how he threw a rock into a cave and became frightened when it echoed back after careening off pottery. He was afraid because perhaps *jinn* (desert demons) were inhabiting the cave.

He also spoke of a cave that he found, but Jordanian soldiers shot at him and drove him away. That was prior to 1966 and he never went back. He even took me to that cave, and I found first-century pottery shards on the surface.

To my knowledge, this cave is unknown to scholars; it is near Ain Feshka, only a short distance south of Qumran. Numerous Qumran specialists in Jerusalem are convinced that this old sun-tanned Arab is, in fact, the true Muhammed Ed-Dib. I wonder, did I meet him in July 1997, or does the name Muhammed Ed-Dib refer generically, for some Arabs, to those who found scrolls in caves near Qumran? Such thoughts leave us pondering the subjunctive in historiography and the accidental behind the acquisition of *realia* and writings.

If we cannot reconstruct one event that happened merely fifty years ago, in our own lifetimes, how can we expect to reconstruct conceptually a whole world that existed two thousand years ago? It is, no doubt, a difficult and precarious task. Yet, virtually all of us agree that understanding a text presupposes a context. A sacred text without the benefit of historiography may be recreated subjectively according to the whims of a Branch Davidian, or of a member of the group that wanted a gateway to heaven, or even of a distinguished professor in a celebrated institution of higher learning. No object—not even a scroll—comes already interpreted. To understand it takes training and expertise in the historical area being considered. Erudition must be supplemented with perspicacity. And, finally, history begins to be comprehended when such focused research is mixed with a pinch of imagination.

These caveats help set the focus of this lecture. I do not propose to present a definitive consensus regarding the Dead Sea Scrolls—the generic name used to describe the hundreds of scrolls found in the vicinity of the Dead Sea. To do so would be premature for many reasons, not the least of which is the recent explosion of publication on the scrolls: On my shelves alone there are now over sixty books on the Dead Sea Scrolls published in the last few years. Each attempts to advance Qumran research or summarize what other scholars have concluded on all the main questions. Sadly, too many of the books are too focused on one fragment to understand the vast corpus as a whole, and too many others are not written by experts in the field. That is to say, it might be easier to discuss the chaos regnant in the field rather than to speak of a consensus.

Such a temptation, however, would lack integrity, because—in my judgment—there is actually more agreement on all the basic issues in the field of Qumran studies than in many areas of biblical research. That is, Dead Sea Scrolls research has moved into an era in which the best scholars, certainly all present at the Princeton Jubilee Symposium, use the same methodology and agree on the same basic issues. Thus, there is more consensus in Qumran research than, for example, in the study of Isaiah or the Gospel of John. With

regard to these latter, one cannot represent a consensus as long as some scholars still view them as a unity, rather than as the products of a three-part redaction. Some scholars even affirm what is unthinkable to most: They clearly advocate that all of the book of Isaiah comes from the eighth-century prophet or that the Gospel of John, sometimes even including 7:53-8:11 (the pericope concerning the adulteress), derives directly from the hand of the apostle John, the son of Zebedee.

Far from declaring or clarifying a consensus, then, I shall rather point to basic agreements that have been emerging over the last fifty years. We all recognize how the Dead Sea Scrolls have enriched our understanding of the ideas and theologies in the Hebrew Scripture (the Old Testament) and the New Testament. We all would admit that the Dead Sea Scrolls are sensation-ally important and that they have caused a paradigm shift in understanding Early Judaism and the origins of Christianity. Most of the experts gathered here would also agree that the shift in understanding Scripture has been monumental and unprecedented—and these scholars represent the best research and teaching in Canada, England, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United States.

This lecture is dedicated to the President, Academic Dean, faculty colleagues, and students of Princeton Theological Seminary who have supported my efforts, and it is also in honor of the distinguished philanthropists, experts, producers, scientists, archaeologists, philologists, historians, and theologians who have traveled, often over long and arduous distances, to celebrate with us one of the greatest discoveries in biblical archaeology. I salute my colleagues because the obstacles we face are almost insurmountable. There are few academic disciplines that are not now included in Qumran studies—from DNA analysis, digital science, and AMS C-14 technology to archaeology, historiography, philology, topography, anthropology, and sociology. And most of these disciplines tend to impinge on our own Herculean task of reconstructing the origin and development of the Qumran Community. But it takes still more. It takes passion and courage. It can be lonely and frightening to advance ahead of the field in search of answers to the questions aroused by studying fragments of documents from an ancient hand. So, with deep admiration I dedicate these thoughts to exceptional minds, great individuals, and cherished friends.

II. DISCOVERY AND CONTROVERSY

The Dead Sea Scrolls are sensational. That is obvious. The tabloids alone have clarified that fact. Dead Sea Scroll jokes have even appeared in

magazines, including *The New Yorker*. But why? In universities, churches, synagogues, and seminaries seventy people may attend a lecture on "Jesus"—if I am fortunate—but five or six times that number will break all commitments in the rush to hear a lecture on "Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls." Why?

Is it because of the wild claims made about these writings? Is it because the Dead Sea Scrolls are now a household name, thanks to Edmund Wilson's publications in the 1950s? Surely, the answer involves something more. It entails pondering the meaning of what preceded the popularizing of the scrolls. It has to do with a Western imagination that is sparked by tales of Arabs gliding over and around rocks in a desert land, searching for buried treasures in hidden caves. It has to do with the fascination many living in Western culture have with Scripture, and with our unending search for what is trustworthy. There are more than just scholars who search to hear within Scripture a sound of God's voice addressed to our own time. It has to do with the freedom now being experienced, for some Christian and Jewish groups for the first time in history, to query traditions and slip past pontifical assertions to find out for themselves what might be the meaning of life. Finally, the Dead Sea Scrolls' sensational character evolves from the recognition that an ancient library has been found. And it belonged to Jews. And not ordinary people or Jews living on the fringes of Second Temple culture, as some like G. Stemberger claim.¹ They were priests, the Sons of Aaron, and Levites. The Qumranites who hid the scrolls lived during the time of the two great teachers, Hillel and Jesus. And the library was found not only in a desert, but in the land—the Holy Land. When we add that this library bears witness to hundreds of writings unknown before 1947, and that most of them were deemed sacred by Jews, then we begin to grasp why the Dead Sea Scrolls are rightly judged to be sensationally important. Let us now turn to comprehending some particulars in this exceptional evaluation.

¹ G. Stemberger, *Jewish Contemporaries of Jesus: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes*, trans. A. W. Mahnke (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 1, states that the Essenes "were a rather radical, marginal group"; he even calls this opinion a "fact." Far more accurate and representative of present scholarly views, and also of the ancient data, is A. J. Saldarini's report (*Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society* [Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1989]) that the Qumran Community, the conservative Essenes, "were part of Jewish society and quite likely had a political impact. They were not completely cut off from Jewish society since the area was inhabited, contained defensive installations and presumably paid taxes to the Hasmoneans and Romans" (5). It is surprising to note that Stemberger disparages the Essenes and then includes them in his study, while Saldarini sees their importance but does not include them in his sociological analysis and synthesis.

A scandal has been far too rampant for decades. It may be summarized in four points that I have heard in different parts of the world:

1. The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947.
2. They were given to Christian scholars to publish.
3. They have not been published.
4. It must follow, therefore, that Christians realize that the Dead Sea Scrolls disprove the essential beliefs of Christianity.

So mixed, this brew has poisoned the minds of far too many. What are the facts?

1. Cave 1 was found fifty years ago and it contained Hebrew and Aramaic writings that have been labeled "Dead Sea Scrolls."
2. They have been given to Christians and Jews to publish.
3. All the full scrolls and those that are preserved in large pieces have been published. Over 250 documents have been published so far.
4. Most of the documents hidden in this ancient Jewish library are extant in about 100,000 fragments that are mixed together. Putting together over 600 documents that were previously unknown and that are preserved in tiny fragments now all jumbled together is a Herculean task.

In addition, it is misleading to report that the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947. The eleven caves in which writings were found were located from 1947 to 1956. In the last year, I have seen fragments of Daniel (at least three), a piece of the Temple Scroll, the beginning of the *Genesis Apocryphon*, a section of the *Rule of the Community*, a portion of the *Rule of the Congregation*, and numerous unidentified fragments. Many of these fragments are unknown to most Qumran experts and have not yet been published. Since scholars cannot publish what is not available to them and fragments continue to appear from private collections, it seems to follow that the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls continues and will continue in the future.

III. A NEW RECONSTRUCTION OF EARLY JUDAISM

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls caused a revolution in the study of what had previously been called "Intertestamental Judaism." Since 1947, scholars slowly, and sometimes grudgingly, admitted that the old portrait of a monolithic and orthodox Judaism before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. was inaccurate. There is now a consensus that to paint the portrait of Judaism before 70 C.E. based on the New Testament, Josephus, and Rabbinics alone is misleading. Each of these ancient collections of documents postdate

70 C.E. and tend to be influenced by later social needs that shaped the different types of Judaism that survived the horrible events of 66–74 C.E. (the First Jewish Revolt against Rome). This factor is poignantly evident in the meaning of three critical words.

First, according to the Gospel of John, some Jews were afraid to confess who Jesus was because of fear that they would be cast out of the synagogue (9:22; 12:42; 16:2). The Greek word for “(casting) out of the synagogue,” *aposunagōgos*, mirrors the breaking up of one great religion, Judaism, into Rabbinic Jews and Christians. That is to say, Christians in the community or school that gave definite shape to the Gospel of John were being cast out of the local synagogue. They could no longer worship with fellow Jews. It is evident not only that some Jews in the Johannine Community or School were being denied permission to worship in the synagogue; it is also clear that they wanted to remain faithful to the sacred liturgies that had shaped their former lives and to continue worshipping with other Jews in the local synagogue. This one word, *aposunagōgos*, becomes a window through which to see a schism developing between those who followed Jesus and those who followed Hillel as well as other Pharisaic-like Rabbis. As the Gospel of John attests, the cost to follow Jesus and confess him christologically was high.

Second, Josephus reported that there were “three sects [or schools of thought] among the Jews” (*Ant.* 13.171). Josephus’ use of *haireseis* was understood by earlier historians of first-century Judaism to mean that Josephus adequately represented Judaism by three “sects”: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. Today, most of us question the use of this Greek term to denote “sects.” We also generally agree that there were more than three main schools of thought among the Jews in ancient Palestine. Today, we all admit this schematization is anachronistic and systematically excludes such groups as the Samaritans, the Zealots, the Sicarii, baptist groups, Enoch groups, the Jewish magical groups, the Boethusians, scribal groups, Galilean miracle workers, Roman quislings, and many others who claimed to be faithful Torah-abiding Jews. It also excludes the group from the first century that became the most powerful of all: the Palestinian Jesus Movement.

Third, according to the Mishnah we learn that the Men of the Great Assembly demanded that all Jews “be cautious in judgment, cause many disciples to stand, and make a fence for the Torah” (*m. Abot* 1:1). The Hebrew word for fence (*syg*) in this famous rabbinic passage was formerly too often understood to indicate that Judaism was cut off from Greek and Roman influence. Thus, the word was misunderstood in terms of all we now know archaeologically and literarily about pre-70 C.E. Jewish phenomena. We now

admit that Early Judaism was a creative, alive culture, thanks to the interchange of ideas and perceptions with foreign religions and cultures. Much more research needs to be devoted to the caravan and trade routes from East to West carrying spices, silk, jewels, and other commodities. The caravan social group, which often consisted of 200 camels, had to pass through the lands of the Bible. Intellectual commodities were brought by the caravan. The individuals in the caravan conversed with Jews in Capernaum, Beth Shean, Jericho, Jerusalem, and other cities and towns. In the market was talk about Zurvan, Buddha, and other deities. A statue of a Hindu goddess was unearthed at Pompeii, which was covered by volcanic ash from Vesuvius in 79 C.E.; the statue obviously was carried through the lands of the Bible, probably before the revolt of 66 to 70 C.E.

In sum, these three words help clarify the paradigm emerging regarding pre-70 C.E. Jewish society and religion. First, *aposunagōgos* in the New Testament clarifies that in the late first-century C.E. there was no definite parting of the ways among Jews and Christians, but the process was nevertheless well underway, at least in the Johannine Community. Second, *baireseis* in Josephus should not be translated "sect," and it should be interpreted in light of the extant Jewish writings that antedate 70 C.E.; that is, there were over twenty groups within Judaism. Third, *syg* in the Mishnah does not hinder the observation that Judaism was a religion in Hellenistic culture and was thus influenced, sometimes significantly, by other religions and philosophies of that time.

Prior to the advent of modern Qumran research, the reconstruction of pre-70 C.E. Judaism was frequently called *Spätjudentum*; that is, "late Judaism." Often, the impression was conveyed that one religion was dying so that another—Christianity—could be born. Second Temple Judaism was misrepresented as orthodox, monolithic, and often legalistic. This model is found, *mutatis mutandis*, in Emil Schürer's nineteenth-century masterpiece, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*. Even the title announces that the goal is not objective historiography but a work that serves and supports the claims of Christianity.

That model has been shattered. Now, thanks to research on the oldest traditions preserved in the New Testament, Josephus, and Rabbinics, and especially the insights obtained from reading the Dead Sea Scrolls and related literatures, such as *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, the *Psalms of Solomon*, and *4 Ezra*, we know that Judaism must not be described in categories such as "orthodox" or "monolithic." These terms tend to suggest that Judaism had fossilized.

But pre-70 C.E. Judaism was alive and fresh, impregnated by advances

found in all contiguous cultures: Greek, Syrian, Parthian, Nabatean, Egyptian, and Roman. Plato's depiction of a world of meaning above the earth, for example, seems to have helped shape Jewish apocalypticism. The concept of "the Isle of the Blessed Ones," found in Homer (*Odyssey* 6.44-45), Hesiod (*Works and Days* 159-60), Pindar (*Olympian Odes* II, 68-72), Herodotus (*History* III.26), Plato (*Phaedo* 109b, 111b, 111c), and Strabo (*Geography* 1.1.5, 3.2.13) has indelibly left its imprint on the *History of the Rechabites*.² The Egyptian drawings of the weighing of the soul after death, known from hieroglyphic texts and tomb drawings, is reflected in the *Testament of Abraham*. And the Qumranic form of dualism, indeed the dualistic paradigm most refined in early Jewish thought, found in the *Rule of the Community* (1QS) 3.13-4.26, was definitely shaped by Zurvanism, which we now know clearly antedates the fifth century B.C.E. These brief examples must suffice to demonstrate that New Testament scholarship today, in contrast to that popular in the 1950s and earlier, is much more like Old Testament research in the sense that New Testament scholars must read more languages than merely Greek and Hebrew and must study other cultures besides Early Judaism, including Egyptian, Parthian, Nabatean, Greek, Syrian, and Roman languages and literatures. This paradigm shift is again at least partly due to the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the renewed interest in New Testament archaeology. In fact, a Nabatean letter has been discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls and a bulla from a seal with a serpent in Egyptian style has been uncovered recently in Bethsaida.³

Formerly, many experts claimed that Jewish liturgical texts were shaped by the Davidic Psalter and that this collection of 150 psalms was the hymnbook of the Second Temple. While the latter point seems still appropriate, it is now clear that Jews continued to compose psalms and attribute them to David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Manasseh, and others. The Davidic Psalter grew to include not only 150 psalms, as in most Bibles, but more than 151 psalms, as in the Septuagint; it expanded to a total of 155 Davidic Psalms. New hymns and psalms were composed and new hymnbooks were created. These bear such names as the *Thanksgiving Hymns*, the *Angelic Liturgy*, *Daily Prayers*, and the *Psalms of Solomon*. These poetic works help us understand not only the poetry but also the liturgical norms of early Palestinian Jews before 70 C.E. They also

² For bibliography and a discussion see James H. Charlesworth, "Greek, Persian, Roman, Syrian, and Egyptian Influences in Early Jewish Theology," in *Hellenica et Judaica: Hommage à Valentin Nikiprowetzky*, ed. A. Caquot et al. (Leuven-Paris: Peeters, 1986), 219-43.

³ See B. Brandl's contribution in *Bethsaida: A City by the North Shore of the Sea of Galilee*, ed. R. Arav and R. A. Freund (Kirkville: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1995), esp. 144-6.

help us to understand, for example, the origins of the hymns that helped shape the Lucan infancy narrative.

While Judaism before 70 C.E. was certainly not orthodox, there was a central base of authority. It was the Temple. The sacerdotal aristocracy became very powerful not only because of the centrality of Jerusalem and the Temple in world Jewry but also because of the vast sums and resources that poured into the Temple treasury. Power emanated from the Temple. But, sociologically speaking, the Temple was not only the source for some unity within Judaism, it also caused divisions within Jewish society. Samaritans, Qumranites, the Palestinian Jesus Movement, and also many other groups originated and were shaped, in no small degree, by their intermittent (or permanent) opposition to the ruling priests and, of course, the persecution they received from the powerful high priests.

All these insights have given rise to a new perception of the origins of Christianity. It is beyond debate, finally, that Christianity began within Judaism and for decades existed as a Jewish group (probably a sect). Thus, scholars are no longer portraying Christianity as primarily a Greek religion, as was vogue in some seminaries and universities before 1947. Deissmann was wrong in claiming that Christianity began as a movement of only the poor and dispossessed, and that this explains why the authors of the Gospels and other early Christian literature were forced to use the Greek of the streets, the *koinē*. Surely, the beginning verses in Luke and the Greek of Hebrews is that of the cultured elite. Lastly, the Bultmannian school tended to think that in the beginning was the sermon that was based on one kerygma. Today, we acknowledge the existence of not one kerygma but many *kerygmata*, even though most early followers of Jesus proclaimed that he was the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Savior who was crucified by evil men but resurrected by God.

Once it was *de rigueur* to admit, often begrudgingly, that Jesus was a Jew. Now, scholars readily admit that Jesus was a profoundly religious Jew. He obeyed and honored the Torah, and he did not break the Sabbath, even though some leading Jews thought he did so in terms of their more rigid definition of the Sabbath laws. Jesus followed the Torah's rules for ritual purity and vehemently resisted the exaggerated extenuation of the rules for priestly purity to all Jews. He knew that only the extremely wealthy could afford large stone vessels to protect commodities from impurity and to contain the water for the Jewish rites of purification (as noted in John 2:6 and as required, for example, in the *Temple Scroll*), although earthen vessels were quite adequate for one's possessions.

Historians have concluded that Jesus revered the Temple, paid the Temple tax, and followed the stipulation in the Torah to make a pilgrimage to the Temple at Passover. He worshipped and taught in the Temple, and his followers, especially Paul and John, as we know from Acts, continued to worship in the Temple. Thus, Jesus was a devout and observant Jew.⁴

Following the lead of Renan, some good scholars, and many crackpots, have tended to conclude, perhaps without adequately researching the question, that Christianity evolved out of Essenism (the type of Judaism represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls). That is wrong. Most scholars now admit that Christianity was profoundly influenced by Essenism, Pharisaism, the baptism movements, the Enoch groups, the Jewish mystical groups, Samaritanism, and many other aspects of Judaism. I side with the majority of experts who have learned to shun the "one idea solution" to what are, in fact, complex origins. The Palestinian Jesus Movement was not a form of Hillelite Pharisaism. It was not even a type of Essenism. While similar to these and many other Judaism groups, it was unique. Only in it is there the claim that a crucified prophet from Galilee is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior.

While these ideas seem dominant in the academy, I do not think there is a consensus regarding the heart of Qumran theology. I, for one, think that we must avoid systematizing Qumran phenomena. There were many competing and conflicting ideas at Qumran, from its founding around 150 B.C.E. to its demise in 68 C.E. On the one hand, we need to resist the temptation to define Qumran theology narrowly and jettison all documents as non-Qumranic if they do not fit our paradigm. On the other hand, we need to be inclusive of all the documents that clearly or apparently represent Qumran theology and seek to discern how diverse that theology seems to have been and where there might be cohesive elements, if not a core. At the same time, there were obviously many competing ideas operative, even at the same time, in the Community. I am also convinced that some Qumranites, not only during their lifetimes but concurrently, held ideas that were far from harmoniously or coherently related. It is Christianity after 325 C.E. that has misled us into thinking about an "either-or"; Jews, as we know so clearly from the Mishnah, Tosephta, and the Talmudim, preferred debates within the house in which the norm tended to be a "both-and."

⁴ This perspective appears in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Jesus' Jewishness: Exploring the Place of Jesus within Early Judaism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991); idem, *Jesus Within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (New York: Doubleday, 1988); and esp. David Flusser's recent *Jesus* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997).

IV. THE IMPACT OF QUMRAN STUDIES ON BIBLICAL RESEARCH

To highlight the importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls for biblical studies and biblical theology I have chosen three areas on which to focus: the Hebrew Scriptures, pre-Rabbinic thought, and the New Testament and Christian origins.

The Hebrew Scriptures

On the one hand, it is obvious, if we focus on the Isaiah scrolls found in Cave 1, that our Bible was carefully copied, *mutatis mutandis*,⁵ for thousands of years. On the other hand, allowing one's view to include the Qumran versions of the books of Samuel and Jeremiah, it is obvious that several ancient versions of these books were revered as God's word at Qumran. The result is a renewed interest in the canon and a growing recognition that the Hebrew canon was not closed before or during the time of Jesus. There was, for example, no one finalized arrangement of what belonged in the Davidic Psalter or what order the psalms were to have.

Equally exciting are some readings that definitely help us improve both the Hebrew texts and the English translations of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. This phenomenon is evident provisionally in both the Revised Standard Version and the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (which I should add took shape here at Princeton Theological Seminary). The Hebrew text from which all modern translations of the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament derive is corrupt in many places. While it is often difficult to decide which reading is original and which secondary, scholars agree that at least in two major places the Hebrew text can now be corrected.

First, when we read Genesis 4:8 in the Hebrew Bible, we are left with the question, "What did Cain say to Abel before he killed him?"

The Hebrew, when translated, states: "And Qayin talked with Hevel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Qayin rose up against Hevel his brother, and slew him."⁶ All we are told is that Cain "talked with" his brother. We are not informed what he said, yet the abrupt and disjointed sentence leaves the impression that the text once told what had been said. The answer is not provided by the Qumran library. The manuscript of Genesis that contains Genesis 4 (4QGen^b) does not preserve what was said.⁷ The ancient and most likely original reading is preserved in the

⁵ See the cautions expressed and illustrated by S. Talmon in his *The World of Qumran from Within* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989), esp. 117-30.

⁶ *The Holy Scriptures* (Jerusalem: Koren, 1988), 3.

⁷ See Eugene Ulrich *et al.*, *Discoveries in the Judean Desert* 12 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 36-7 (Pls. 6-8).

Samaritan Pentateuch: "Let us go (into) the field." The Greek translation (Septuagint) also has the quotation: "And Cain said to Abel his brother, 'Let us go out into the field'; and it came to pass that when they were in the plain Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him." The Syriac has the same reading, and it is probably dependent on the Greek. The Targumim and the Old Latin version also preserve the full text. We now know what Cain said to Abel before he murdered him. He said, "Let us go out into the field."

Second, according to 1 Samuel 11:1 we read "Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and camped against Yavesh-Gil'ad."⁸ The text seems strange. Who is this Nahash? It is scarcely sufficient to assume he was a snake, the meaning of the Hebrew word. Now, we have a fuller text of this passage, thanks to the Qumran library. A Qumran text of 1 Samuel (4QSam^a) reports that Nahash gouged out the right eyes of all the Israelites beyond the Jordan. Textual experts should have no problem with this reading. It rings of authenticity; that is, we know that about this time in history Israel's enemies did put out the eyes of Israelites. The most famous example pertains to Samson whose eyes were gouged out by the Philistines (Judg. 16:21). The longer reading in 4QSam^a also fits the narrative style of the author of 1 Samuel, who usually describes the character of a person when he or she is first mentioned. An ancient scribe erroneously omitted the following words:

[And Na]hash, king of the Ammonites, sorely oppressed the children of Gad and the children of Reuben, and he gouged out a[ll] their right eyes and struck ter[r]or and dread] in Israel. There was not left one among the children of Israel bey[ond Jordan who]se right eye was no[t go]uged out by Naha[sh king] of the children of [A]mmon; except seven thousand men [fled from] the children of Ammon and entered [J]abesh-Gilead. About a month later, . . .⁹

This is a very large omission in our Bibles. The words and sentences were inadvertently missed by a copying scribe. The scribe's error is easily explained by *parablepsis* facilitated by *homoioarchton*. That is, the scribe looked back from his copy to the manuscript he was copying and let his eye return not to the Nahash he had just copied but to the same noun two lines farther down the

⁸ *The Holy Scriptures*, 336.

⁹ Here the medieval manuscripts begin 11:1. For the text, translation, and photograph of this passage see F. M. Cross, "The Ammonite Oppression of the Tribes of Gad and Reuben: Missing Verses from 1 Samuel Found in 4QSamuel^a," in *The Hebrew and Greek Texts of Samuel*, ed. E. Tov (Jerusalem: Academon, 1980), 105-19; and idem, "The Ammonite Oppression of the Tribes of Gad and Reuben: Missing Verses from 1 Samuel Found in 4QSamuel^a," in *History, Historiography, and Interpretation*, ed. H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), 148-58.

column. Most likely the scribe had an exemplar that began two lines with the same word, Nahash. As his eye strayed from one of these to the other he omitted the intervening lines. Our extant medieval Hebrew manuscripts of 1 Samuel all have this error. Moreover, in the Hebrew text upon which all modern translations are based, and even in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, there are two untranslatable words (*wyby nmbrys*) at the end of the preceding verse. It is now obvious that these should be divided so as to produce three words meaning "About a month later" (*wyby kmw hds*). Thanks to the ancient copy of this biblical book found at Qumran we can restore not only the text but also all modern translations based upon it. Indeed, this reading has already been put in the text of the NRSV.

There is something even more exciting about this research. Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century C.E., quoted the Bible at this point. His quotation is perfectly in line with the Qumran text (*Ant.* 6.5.1). It is likely that after the Roman soldiers captured Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Josephus took with him to Rome from Jerusalem a version of the text of Samuel, and that that version is the one we now know existed before 70 C.E. and was known to the Qumranites (*Vita* 416-18).¹⁰

Pre-Rabbinic Thought

Biblical scholars know they cannot ignore the Mishnah, the Tosephta, or the Talmudim in understanding Jewish life in Palestine before 135 C.E. But how can one use these documents when they are so clearly shaped by social and theological concerns that are patently much later? Two insights have been obtained in the last two decades.

First, thanks to *More Works of the Torah* (4QMMT) we know that some of the rules for living and interpreting Scripture are not only pre-70 C.E. but also markedly antedate the first century C.E. The issue seems not to be whether we can see proto-Sadducean *halakoth* (religious and ethical rules) in this document. The real issue is the palpable evidence of rabbinic methodology long before Jamnia, the first Rabbinic academy.

Second, it has been customary to attribute the rise of Jewish mysticism to the seventh and later centuries of this era. Now, we know that the interest in the cosmic halls of the Creator is a pre-Christian phenomenon. Jewish mysticism is obviously evident not only in the *Thanksgiving Hymns* but also, and more obviously, in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*. We should rethink

¹⁰ Eugene Ulrich has demonstrated this point in his *The Qumran Text of Samuel and Josephus* (Missoula: Scholars, 1978), esp. 165-91.

our shared contention that 70 C.E. was a barrier and a time when religious life ceased in ancient Palestine. That may follow from studying Gamla and parts of Jerusalem. Studying the archaeology of Sepphoris and Caesarea Maritima, however, reveals that 70 C.E. was certainly a divide in history, but it not a barrier for traditions and the continuity of life. The chronological spectrum of Jewish thought from the Maccabees to the Mishnah is not as compartmentalized as we have tended to assume.

The New Testament and Christian Origins

By far the major breakthroughs in evidence and insight gleaned from the Dead Sea Scrolls pertain to our revised understanding of the origins of Christianity. Hundreds of monographs have been devoted to this area of research and here I propose only to provide a glimpse into some broad issues.

John the Baptist is similar in numerous ways to the Qumranites. Like them, he stressed the importance of Isaiah 40:3, probably interpreted the verse as they had, and joined them in attempting to prepare in the wilderness the way of Yahweh; this probably included the appearance of the Messiah. He was deeply eschatological as were the Qumranites, and he also stressed the impending day of judgment. He may well have once been a member of the Qumran Community, but he would have rejected their strict concept of predestination, their damnation of most of humanity, and their injunction to remain separate from others, even from the members of one's own family. If John the Baptizer had once been a member of the Qumran Community, we now can understand why he was in the wilderness. As the son of a priest, as Luke reports, he might have been attracted to the dedicated priests living in the wilderness at Qumran. If he had once been a Qumranite, we can now understand why he refused to accept food or clothing from others: Like others at Qumran, he had promised God that he would not accept food or clothing from others. As we find him portrayed in the Gospels, eating only honey and wild locusts and wearing only the skins of animals, he would have kept inviolate his vows made to God while a member, or perhaps only a prospective member, of the Qumran Community.

Popular books from the 1950s to the 1990s claim that Jesus was the Righteous Teacher of Qumran. Most scholars regard such books as simply crackpot literature; clearly, some sensationalists are more interested in becoming millionaires than in searching for truthful answers. I am convinced that Jesus was certainly not an Essene or markedly influenced by Qumran ideas. But that conclusion does not mean he never met an Essene. He knew about them and probably spoke with Essenes daily. He shared with them the

same basic perspective: Only God is Lord and only God deserves our total commitment. Jesus, like the Essenes, believed that his time was pregnant with meaning because God was moving again to act decisively on behalf of his nation. Jesus, like the Essenes, conceived of a cosmos shattered by a struggle between evil and good forces. He, like them, contended that a judgment day for the righteous and unrighteous was not far off. Thus, like the Qumranites and Essenes, Jesus placed emphasis on time and not place.

As we think about the Righteous Teacher and the importance of being informed of what sociologists and anthropologists have discovered about social groups and prominent figures, Jesus is best described as a charismatic who was apocalyptically influenced and fundamentally eschatological in his teaching about the dawn of God's Rule. He was an itinerant prophet who had powers to perform miracles and who, like the Essenes and Qumranites, opposed the Jerusalem-based sacerdotal aristocracy and their self-professed monopoly on spirituality and the meaning of purity.

Jesus, according to both Luke and John, used the phrase "Sons of Light." If he did, then he most likely used it to refer to Essenes who may not have coined that term but certainly made it their own peculiar designation within the world of Early Judaism. He most likely spoke against their slavish elevation of Sabbath laws over the basic morality of the Torah. He must have known about some of the writings of the Essenes. When he asked who would leave an animal in a pit, dying, on the Sabbath he most likely spoke directly against an Essene teaching found in the *Damascus Document*. Let me illustrate: According to Matthew 12:11 Jesus said, "What persons among you, if they have a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?" This saying is hard to understand. Wouldn't any one help an animal from drowning in a pit on the Sabbath? What could be the context of this text? We find it in a document very important to the Qumranite Essenes, the *Damascus Document*. The wording is surprisingly similar, even identical, to the words Matthew attributes to Jesus: If an animal "falls into a pit or a ditch, let him not raise it on the Sabbath" (CD MS A 11.13-14). It is certainly conceivable that Jesus knew this Essene teaching; in fact I side with the scholars who conclude that he must have known it, otherwise he is left making little or no sense.

When Jesus exhorted his followers to be attentive to the God who knew the number of hairs on one's head, he most likely knew and rejected the teaching in the *Damascus Document* that advised one with an ailment to shave his head so that the priest could count the number of hairs and so discern the cause of the malady. Most emphatically, Jesus rejected the Essenes' concept of a

bifurcated anthropology, damnation of some souls at birth (double predestination; which may have been an Essene creation). He also rejected their scruples about being pure and clean and separate from lepers and others judged polluted or outcast by Jewish society.

As far as we know, no Essene or Qumranite followed Jesus and became a disciple. But, after his death and after his disciples claimed he had been raised by God, some—perhaps many—Essenes may have joined the Palestinian Jesus Movement. We are led to that conclusion because the author of Acts reported that many priests became obedient “to the faith.” We discern this scenario because of Essene influences on the documents found in the New Testament. The most impressive and numerous signs of Essene influence on the documents in the New Testament are clearly in those that were composed, or took definite shape, after 70 C.E. Documents like Ephesians, the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of John, and 1 John show Essene influence. The best explanation is that some Essenes, who represented a great school of writing in Second Temple times, joined the Jesus Movement and helped shape—sometimes in significant ways—the new writing schools of Paul, Matthew, and John.

The document most influenced by the Essenes is the Gospel of John. I cannot agree with Raymond Brown that the influence was only indirect, but I also wish to distance myself from John Ashton who concludes that the Fourth Evangelist had been an Essene. While this is conceivable, I think it is much more likely that Essenes had, as had the Samaritans, joined the Johannine School or Community. Many of the technical terms and ideas that we have labeled “Johannine,” are now seen to have been Qumranic; foremost among such would be terms like “Sons of Light” and “walking in the light,” or ideas such as the explanation of evil by positing a dualism between light and darkness, good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, and the promise of eschatological rewards: eternal life for the elect and damnation and final annihilation for those who are not chosen.

Summary

When the Arab threw that rock into Cave 1 fifty years ago, he shattered more than earthen vessels. He shattered historical reconstructions that had been encapsulated within earthly categories. The archaeological *realia* of pre-70 C.E. life—that is, the stone vessels for the Jewish rites of purification, arrow heads, braided hair, sandals, glassware for cosmetics, coins, woven fabrics and mats, statues, images, and even the remains of humans who lived 2,000 years ago—reveal to us the proper approach to reconstructing first-

century Jewish life. It is not sitting before a text far removed from the sights, sounds, sites, and topography that helped shape that world. It is in moving from palpable *realia* to the setting in which recorded events were lived out. Surely, the most important dimension of Qumran research is the way it helps us to understand a culture and time that is sufficiently different from our own so that it has the power to challenge our own solutions. We are beginning to perceive the setting of past events, and we now know—even more than we did before—that each text must be understood in *con*-text.

V. CONCLUSION

Fifty years ago the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. At the same time, the National Basketball Association (NBA) was founded. In this game that has won the enthusiasm of Americans, Israelis, and indeed many people throughout the world, meaning is obtained by defining space, time, and rules. From years of avidly following this microcosm and reading *The NBA at 50*, I want to reflect on the eerie similarity between the spirituality of the professional athletes of the NBA and the athletic determination of the spiritual heroes of Qumran.¹¹ Somewhat like the Qumranites who lived together, the members of a team know that in unity, harmony, and oneness the ultimate goal to be shared by all defines the meaning in necessary sacrifice. As Magic Johnson saluted Larry Bird for his single-mindedness to do anything to win, so the Qumranites devoted themselves totally to preparing the Way; indeed, they conceived of themselves as members of the Way. When Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the Zen guru of the NBA,¹² talks about preparing himself so that he can become one with the target, I am reminded of the Holy Ones who struggled to purify themselves to become one with the angels and receive the reward of a crown of glory and everlasting life. Like Michael Jordan,¹³ the Qumranites constantly placed upon themselves greater demands than another could place on them, but—of course—neither he nor they can really fly.

These humorous reflections allow for the necessary transition to a final moment of reflection. Without defining space, time, and the rules there is meaninglessness. Contemporary society, hardly worthy of being called a culture, witnesses to the breaking of spaces, times, and especially rules. Hence, too many have given up on a future Utopia. However, when each of these are clarified, pellucid meaning springs forth, like Athena from the head of Zeus. There is enthusiasm. And for the Qumranites and the members of

¹¹ M. Vancil, ed., *The NBA at 50* (New York: Random House, 1996).

¹² *Ibid.*, 84–5; see also 40–1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 28–9, 194–5.

the Jesus sect that much maligned word meant devoting all so that God would be present and we would be in God. Feeling a leather basketball or the leather fragment of a Dead Sea Scroll stimulates me to reflect on a world well-defined and full of meaning. I think about a cosmos in which humans unite in time and place with the promises of meaning and rewards. And so let me end by reading from the hymn that concludes the *Rule of the Community*:

(With) the offering of the lips I will praise him
according to a statute engraved forever:
at the heads of years and at the turning-point of their seasons,
by the completion of the statute of their norm
—(each) day (having) its precept—
one after another,
(from) the season for harvest until summer;
(from) the season of sowing until the season of grass;
(from) the seasons for years until their seven-year periods;
at the beginning of their seven-year period until the Jubilee (1QS 10.6-8).

Qumran and Supersessionism—and the Road Not Taken

by KRISTER STENDAHL

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THE TOPIC that has been assigned to me—Qumran and Supersessionism—sends me to reflect not so much about the Qumran material as such, but about how my exposure to the scrolls from Cave 1 in André Dupont-Sommer's seminar at l'École pratique des Hautes Études in Paris in the spring of 1951 started me on a lifelong quest for a better way to understand Jewish-Christian interplay and lack of interplay. Actually, from the beginning and throughout history up to the present that interplay is to a large extent marked and marred by supersessionism and its replacement mechanisms.

I. THE PROBLEM OF SUPERSESSIONISM: QUMRAN AND CHRISTIANITY

The Qumran texts and that whereof they speak can sharpen the analysis needed in a search for better ways to deal with Jewish-Christian interplay. In those texts, one can see with great clarity that the driving force behind supersessionism is the claim to the true, authentic, and only legitimate continuity to the inherited history. At Qumran, we see this claim intensified by high voltage eschatology with all the habits of demonizing the Other that comes with the territory; the heightened standards of purity add weight to the claim as it is buttressed by divinely authorized (re)interpretation, (re)assessment, and (re)adjustment of that tradition to which one claims to be the legitimate heir. The claim to exclusive continuity is the very spine of supersessionism.

The evidence for the analogous Christian claim to be the true, exclusive, authentic, and legitimate continuity is certainly the Christian Bible itself with its Old and New Testaments. As James Sanders has pointed out so well, the fact that the Church's Bible absorbed the scriptures of the Jews, should not be

seen as an act of a positive evolution of Judaism, but as *the* expression of Christian supersessionism.¹

The way most Christian scholars today distinguish between the two Testaments is a post-Enlightenment phenomenon. It also has academic-sociological dimensions. Old and New Testament scholars keep different company. Even in the Society of Biblical Literature they seldom take part in one another's sessions. For scholarly purposes, the Bible of the Christian Church is not any longer a unified whole. This relatively new development—after all, even Julius Wellhausen found it incumbent to write significant commentaries on the Gospels—has intensified with the well-intentioned term “Hebrew Bible,” which inadvertently feeds into a new form of Marcionism—giving Adolf von Harnack a posthumous victory. While it affirms the integrity of the Tanakh, it suggests that Christianity is equivalent with the New Testament. But the Christian Bible has two Testaments, an Old and a New; by that very structure it makes its claim to continuity and hence legitimacy, that is to say it constitutes exhibit A of Christian supersessionism.

In Qumran studies, one finds extensive discussions about the status of the sectarian material. I would place much of it equal to the early Christian texts that became the New Testament. For these texts are the very material in which and by which the two communities make their respective claims to authentic continuity.

In the Christian case, the “sectarian documents,” also known as the New Testament, show both the joy and the strain of a remarkable development, one that could not have been anticipated and that did not make it easy to claim continuity.

Take, for instance, the Galilean, self-evidently Jewish, Jesus movement, which in a surprisingly short time turns out to be what for all practical purposes must be seen as a predominantly Gentile movement. In any case, the latter is the “Christianity” that produced the New Testament and for which it claims legitimate continuity. The “shift” is most stylized in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus forbids his disciples to go beyond the confines of Israel—but the final words of the Gospel send the apostles out to “all the Gentiles.”

In this perspective, “the parting of the ways” is perhaps best understood in “demographic” terms rather than due to specific questions of doctrine or even praxis. Already some twenty-five years after Jesus' ministry, Paul is puzzled by the phenomenon that only a small “remnant” of Jews have joined the movement, while the Gentiles seem to be in the majority. And already in

¹ See James Sanders' contribution to *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Volume 1, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Berkeley: Bibal, forthcoming, 1998).

Paul's writings—which are the earliest we have—Christ (“Messiah”) is a name, not a messianic title, and the confession is not “Jesus is the Christ” but “Jesus is Lord.” The operative theological terms are “Lord”² and “Son of God.” In my judgment, all this points to the ways in which the “Christianity” of the New Testament is a primarily Gentile phenomenon, with its writings all originally in Greek. The transition or transmutation must have put great strain on the claim to continuity, a strain that could be expected to intensify the claim.

It must have gladdened the heart and mind of Paul when he came to think of how, in the book of Genesis, Abraham's faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness”—and that while Abraham was still a Gentile, circumcision occurring only “two chapters” later.³ What an exegetical and theological find! He introduced it by writing: “Do we then make Torah obsolete by our understanding the faith of Gentiles? God forbid! We claim to be true to the Torah (that is, the Pentateuch), see Genesis 15 . . .” (Rom. 3:31).

The logic of this thinking could actually have opened up a future in which Christianity could have both seen itself and been seen by Israel and the Nations as a “Judaism for Gentiles.” But this was one road not taken. In such a model the supersessionism would have been overcome by a *benevolent* typology: There is a familiar shape to God's ways with the world, God's ever repeated attempts at the mending of what was broken, even restoring the *imago dei* in which humanity had been created. Such a benevolent typology would rejoice and marvel in the analogous shape of Passover and Easter, of Aqedah and Golgotha, of Sinai and the Sermon on the Mount. But the supersessionist drive forced typological interpretation into adversarial patterns where the younger had to trump and trounce the older.

In his study, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity*,⁴ Jon D. Levenson has taken the discussion of supersessionism to a provocatively deeper level. He sees Judaism and Christianity “as two rival midrashic systems, competing for their common biblical legacy.” That competition “reenacts the sibling rivalry at

² By “blessed ambiguity” the Septuagint's (LXX) way of using *kyrios* for Yahweh allowed for “high christology” as Scripture's words about God were applied to Jesus whenever it was deemed appropriate.

³ As usual, Paul quotes the LXX with its common translation *dikaioynē* for *šēḏāqā* (Gen. 15:6). The JPS translation takes the verse into the continuity of Jewish tradition: “And because he put his trust in the Lord, He reckoned it to his merit.”

⁴ Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

the core of ancient Israel's account of its own tortured origins."⁵ In such a perspective, the strain by which the Jewish Jesus movement became the Gentile Church looks less strange. But it is in the final paragraph of his preface that Levenson deepens the agenda most boldly for the relations between Judaism and Christianity:

Radically transformed but never uprooted, the sacrifice of the first-born son constitutes a strange and usually overlooked bond between Judaism and Christianity and thus a major but unexplored focus for Jewish-Christian dialogue. In the past this dialogue has too often centered on the Jewishness of Jesus and, in particular, his putative roles of prophet and sage. In point of fact, however, those roles, even if real, have historically been vastly less important in Christian tradition than Jesus' identity as sacrificial victim, the son handed over to death by his loving father or the lamb who takes away the sins of the world. This identity, ostensibly so alien to Judaism, was itself constructed from Jewish reflection on the beloved sons of the Hebrew Bible, reflection that long survived the rise of Christianity and has persisted into the post-Holocaust era. The bond between Jewry and the Church that the beloved son constitutes is, however, enormously problematic. For the longstanding claim of the Church that it *supersedes* the Jews in large measure continues the old narrative pattern in which a late-born son dislodges his first-born brothers, with varying degrees of success. Nowhere does Christianity betray its indebtedness to Judaism more than in its supersessionism.⁶

So what else is there? There is Abel over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over his older brothers, Israel over Canaan—and the pattern continues, not only Church over Synagogue, but Islam over both Judaism and Christianity, and Protestants over Catholics in the Reformation. In no case is complementarity or coexistence an option chosen; there is always the claim to exclusive legitimacy.

One of the meaningful events in our Qumran Jubilee celebration is the lifting up of passages from the writings of that community and using them for timeless reflection and even prayer. The beauty and spiritual insight in these selections and many others found in those caves is *awesome*. My Lutheran heart is warmed indeed when I make these words my own:

⁵ Ibid., 232.

⁶ Ibid., x.

As for me,
 my justification is with God.
 In His hand are the perfection of my way
 and the uprightness of my heart.
 He will wipe out my transgression
 through His righteousness.
 For my light has sprung
 from the source of His knowledge;
 my eyes have beheld His marvelous deeds,
 and the light of my heart, the mystery to come.
 He that is everlasting
 is the support of my right hand;
 the way of my steps is over stout rock
 which nothing shall shake;
 for the rock of my steps is the truth of God
 and His might is the support of my right hand (1QS 11.2-5).⁷

Awesome indeed is such a hymn, full of spiritual beauty. But much is *awful* rather than awesome as Qumran eschatology escalates into apocalyptic hatred of the Other, an "[e]verlasting hatred in a spirit of secrecy for the men of perdition!" (1QS 9.21-22).⁸

Such sentiments remind us that we are heirs to traditions that have—in their very structure the negation if not the demonization of the Other. So the serious theological question is: What to do? How do we counteract the undesirable effects of the supersessionist instinct? Actually, "undesirable" is a pale euphemism when considering the cost in humiliations, sufferings, and lives throughout history.

Yet there is irony here in the ways supersessionism functioned when it was complete and when the reality of the Jewish people was not part of the conscious consciousness of Christian piety. I can witness to that from my own experience and that of the vast majority of Christians in the world where I grew up. A much beloved hymn for Holy Week can illustrate what I have in mind. It was written by Johann Hermann (ca. 1630) and is representative of the spirituality that forms a bridge between Medieval and Pietist spirituality:

⁷ The translation is taken from Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1997), 115.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 111. The combination of (secret) hatred and non-retaliation here and in the hymn in 1QS 10 has its New Testament parallel in Paul's famous passage on non-retaliation as a "heaping of burning coals on the head of one's enemy" (Rom. 12:20). See my article "Hate, Non-retaliation, and Love: Coals of Fire," *HTR* 55 (1962), 345-55, also in my *Meanings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 137-49.

Ah, holy Jesus, how hast thou offended,
 that man to judge thee hath in hate pretended?
 By foes derided, by thine own rejected,
 O most afflicted.
 Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?
 Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee.
 'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee;
 I crucified thee.

"It was I, Lord Jesus . . . I crucified thee." That is how I remember my stance and mood on Good Friday. And the haunting questions in the refrain of the *Reproaches*: "O, my people, what have I done to thee? Or in what have I afflicted thee? Answer me!"—those questions likewise were heard as chastising our sins made more grievous in contrast to God's generous acts—just as such words do when they first occur in the book of the prophet Micah.⁹

For generations that is how Christians have read their Bibles. Generations were taught to apply the rule: *tua res agitur*—"it is your case that is dealt with." They have read the words of their Old Testament as directed to themselves, be it as human beings in general or as Christians in particular. Especially in their hymns and their liturgies have they spoken of themselves as Zion; as Jerusalem; as the sons (and daughters) of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; as Israel. They have done so without feeling the need to supply "the new" before those glorious self-designations.

Yet one should note that there is a difference when this unconscious move of hermeneutics applies to the New Testament texts. For here the designation "Jews" is locked into the construct "Jew = sinner = me qua sinner," including the sin of self-righteousness. The word "Jew" has negative tenor in the New Testament. Thus, it is striking that when a positive connotation is called for as in the famous words about Nathaniel, then it says: "See, there is a true *Israelite* in whom there is no guile" (John 1:47). That is also consistent with the ways in which the church's identification with Israel in its reading of the Old Testament oscillates between the pattern of promise/fulfillment and of a more thoroughgoing supersessionism where the texts are read directly as about "the church" or "us" or "me." Often the same text can function in both ways simultaneously.

⁹ The *Reproaches* and their precursors, dating back to Melito of Sardis' Sermon on the Passion (second century), are patterned after Micah 6:3: "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt. . ."

The irony with this type of supersessionism is, of course, that it is chemically free from any conscious anti-Judaism, but this is "achieved" by making the Jews and the Jewish community invisible, as if they did not exist. There is a mental obliteration. To use an anachronistic and heavy-laden term, such Christian readings of the Bible are *Judenrein*. Here is the ultimate supersessionism. Yet, this supersessionism is harder to unmask since the subjective experience of its practitioner—and I was brought up to be one and must still admit to the spiritual power and beauty of that practice¹⁰—is one of transcending the very anti-Judaism of which this spirituality is the ultimate expression. Here is irony indeed, or to use Levenson's words, here is another "enormously problematic" facet of supersessionism. Thus, I place another irony side by side with the irony that Levenson ponders when he speaks of supersessionism as a common bond. It is an enormously problematic bondage.

II. ONE ROAD NOT TAKEN

I think of myself as writing an essay in the original sense of that word—an attempt to ask if there are insights in our traditions that point toward roads not (yet) taken.

One such insight comes from Israel's self-understanding, no doubt intensified by 2000 years of diaspora. Israel knows itself to be "a light to the Nations," to the Other; it knows itself to be a particular people, faithful to its covenant. Jews have never thought that God's hottest dream was that all people become Jews. I believe that such faithful particularity is the key to religious existence in an irreducibly pluralist world; but, since the Enlightenment, such particularism, and not least Jewish particularism, has been much maligned for being parochial, tribal, and worse, while Christianity sought glory by claiming New Testament universalism over the particularism of the Old Testament. The Enlightenment loved the universal and loved the individual, but had little patience with anything in between. Hence, the famous French dictum: "To the Jew as individual, everything—to the Jews as a people, nothing."

In a pluralist world, not least a religiously pluralist world, the universalist instinct and drive must come in for reassessment. To know oneself to be—at best—a light to the world, leaving universalism to God in whose eyes

¹⁰ While I have referred to my own experiences from growing up in Sweden, my work over the years with Christians from Asia and Africa has taught me that the hermeneutics I describe here seem to be a natural one even where there is no significant Jewish presence. The establishment of the State of Israel is changing all that by giving the Jewish people a presence on the global scene, making Jewish invisibility obsolete also in hermeneutics.

we are all minorities, is the humility that behooves all who have been touched by God. To believe Matthew's story, Jesus shared this perspective. "You are the salt of the earth"—but who wants the whole earth to become a salt mine? "You are the light of the world. . ." All is striking, minority language. In Maimonides, the same perspective engenders the vision of Christianity and Islam as bearers of Torah to the Gentile world, and a venerable scholar of Rabbinic Judaism writes: "In their relations with other nations, most of the sages would have satisfied themselves with the declaration of Micah (4:5): 'For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.'"¹¹

When the sages of Rabbinic Judaism increased the emphasis on covenantal faithfulness to Torah and de facto spurned apocalyptic and even eschatological speculation—the very trait that Qumran and Christianity have most in common—this particularism was affirmed and proved formative for 2000 years of diaspora living.

But when Christianity—and less directly Islam—fell heir to the biblical tradition and coupled their supersessionist claims with universal assertions, the road was open for a mindset that led to crusades and *jihad*, pogroms and worse. In milder climes that same universalism makes it difficult for Christians and Muslims to fathom that Christianization, or Islamization, of the world might *not* be God's ultimate goal.

It is moving to remember that it is in the writings of Paul the Apostle—the missionary to the Gentiles—that one finds an unexpected opening, a door ajar to a road not taken. Toward the end of his ministry in the East he reflects on how the success of his mission to the Gentiles has made his converts feel superior to the Jews—to Israel, as he says, consciously using the more religious nomenclature. This makes him upset and he conjures up various metaphors to counteract such Christian hybris. Then he tells them a "mystery, lest you be conceited," and the mystery is that the salvation of Israel is assured and hence none of their business. "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God" (Rom. 11:11–36).

So Paul saw it—he had an inkling of the whole tragic history of Christian supersessionism. He who definitely was not ashamed of the gospel, he saw what could go wrong with it. Perhaps because he had been burned once—it was out of religious zeal that he had persecuted the followers of Jesus, and he did not want to have it happen again—now in reverse.

¹¹ E. E. Urbach in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, 3 vols., eds. E. P. Sanders et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 2.298. I note with interest that Urbach renders the Micah text "*and we will walk*," not "*but we will walk*."

Is there a road not taken? Yes, I think there is. For perhaps there is no need for Jews and Christians to legitimize one another, nor to de-legitimize one another. Much of Jewish and Christian scholarship during the last fifty years, as it has been vitalized by the Dead Sea Scrolls, has stressed in various ways the Jewishness of Jesus, and we do need to stress again and again that "Christianity" is a construct that had not yet been formed—especially in New Testament times¹²—and that the Jesus movement existed once as a Jewish "way" in Palestine and in the Diaspora. But with the problem of supersessionism before our eyes, by stressing the Jewishness of Christianity, the problem with Christian supersessionism is inadvertently intensified. The intra-Jewish tension intensifies the search for legitimizing one's true continuity. Hence, something must be said about the need for disentanglement of the two. In order to break the spine and the spell of supersessionism, we should carefully think about whether that habit of claiming continuity must not be coupled with an awareness that new things do emerge, developments that do not call for the legitimizing or de-legitimizing of the Other.

The road taken, the road of supersessionism, has proven to be a dead end, even a road to death. The road not taken, but to which some signs within our traditions point, is worth our serious consideration.

¹² See Donald Juell's forthcoming contribution in *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*.

Theology and Spirituality: Or, Why Religion Is Not Critical Reflection on Religious Experience

by ERIC O. SPRINGSTED

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I HAD THE great good fortune to study with Dick Allen over the course of two academic degrees. Crucial as his classroom and seminar efforts to instruct me were to my education, they were not, however, the most important part of my education. Rather, I learned most from Dick Allen at a lunch table in his dining room, where over the course of four or five years we (along with Jeff Eaton for the first couple of years), without any discernible plan but with increasing mutual enthusiasm and edification, read and discussed together Epictetus, Plato, Aristotle, and finally Simone Weil. I do not think it is possible to overestimate the importance of learning any *Geisteswissenschaft*, but theology and philosophy particularly, in the context of friendship, nor, as Aristotle saw, of overestimating the importance of a common pursuit of the knowledge of the Good to forming a friendship.¹

Theology and philosophy learned in the context of friendship, in the context of an interpersonal activity, can take on a very different character than it might have when it is learned simply in a classroom. It is, for example, something that one learns in good part because of the grace of another's trying to help one understand, and that one learns by trying to help another understand. One learns to take personal responsibility for what one knows. Now, Dick and I learned much from those discussions, including much *about* Epictetus, Plato, Aristotle, and Weil. But I suspect what was most important about those discussions was what we learned about the nature of theology itself (and ancient philosophy), namely, that it does always involve personal grace and responsibility, that it is itself therefore primarily a spiritual enterprise. For theology is something that shapes the thinker; it is *not*, as is

¹ On this notion and others mentioned in this section, see David Burrell's contribution to *Spirituality and Theology: Essays in Honor of Diogenes Allen*, ed. Eric O. Springsted (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998).

platitudinously claimed in contemporary theological circles, "critical reflection upon religious experience."

But what does it mean to say that theology is or ought to be spiritual? Such a claim is not analogous to saying that physics is scientific. For whereas physics is scientific because it is in accord with scientific method, that is, it reflects critically on empirical data, theology is not spiritual because of a spiritual method. Although there are spiritual methods, they do not involve the same sort of theoretical bases that scientific ones do. Rather, theology is spiritual because it involves an improvement, or is tied to an improvement, of the spirit. That theology has something to do with spirituality, therefore, means that we not only think of God, but by thinking of God truly at all we are at the same time involved with God in such a way that our spirits are improved by that involvement, by that thinking. This is what it means to say theology is spiritual, for there is an important connection between the thought and the improvement of the thinker. This makes theology, thinking on God, unique not only because God is unique, but also because the thought is related to a change within the thinker that comes from an active relationship with God. I do not believe that sciences make anything like this claim that one becomes like what one studies.

I. THE NATURE OF FAITH

In order to explain this claim, I want to start at a place that is, undoubtedly, overly familiar to most philosophers of religion, namely, Pascal's "wager argument." It is not the wager or the argument itself that I am particularly concerned with, however, but rather the story that Pascal is telling about faith. In this vein, I would like to start at the end, that is, with the advice that Pascal offers to the man to whom he is speaking (a professional gambler, to be precise), who, despite seeing the rationality of making the wager in question, cannot make it—which is to say, he still refuses to believe in God. Now, Pascal's advice in this situation is that the man follow the example of many before him: "Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believed, taking holy water, having masses said, etc."²

Ever since Pascal penned this advice, it has been roundly attacked as being everything from making faith into a matter of fraudulent self-suggestion to inviting dishonesty and superstition. The heart of the criticism that has been directed against Pascal was perhaps best put by the American philosopher W.

² Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and the Provincial Letters*, no. 233, trans. W. F. Trotter and Thomas M'Cric (New York: Random House, 1941), 83.

K. Clifford.³ He illustrated his point by using this example: A shipowner was about to put a ship to sea filled with many emigrants hoping to go to a new land. He had many reasons to doubt the seaworthiness of the ship, however, and that caused him many doubts about whether he should let it sail. In time, however, he was able to overcome these doubts, reasoning that in years past, when it was young, it had weathered many storms, and also reasoning that providence could not fail to protect all these worthy emigrants. Therefore he let it sail, and later collected his insurance money when it went down in mid-ocean. This man, Clifford contended, was guilty of the death of all those people, for, he pointed out, the man had no reason to believe on such evidence as was before him. He did not earn his faith in providence by examining providence; he simply stifled his doubts.

Now, one way of describing what the shipowner did is to say that he followed, more or less, Pascal's advice: He trusted and acted before he had sufficient reason to believe that such trust and action were warranted. In short, he had faith before he had formed an adequate belief about that in which he trusted. He had faith before belief.

I put it this way for a simple reason, namely, that what Clifford appeals to is what appears to be mere common sense, not only in things worldly, but also in things religious. That is to say, we assume as a matter of course that belief—belief that God exists, that God is good, that God is capable of doing the things people claim God is capable of—must be established, at least with some probability, before we can put our trust, our faith, in God.

The thought seems obvious. If we didn't first believe that God exists, if we didn't already believe that God is good, we couldn't trust God. This way of going about things also seems to be taken on good authority. For example, St. Thomas Aquinas in his magisterial *Summa Theologiae*, in one of the first questions of that huge book,⁴ seeks to establish that the existence of God can be proved, and proves it, before he goes on to describe what God is like, and what life in God, the life of faith, is like.

And yet for all the apparent obviousness of this approach to thinking about faith and belief, I think that it is wrong. I think St. Thomas Aquinas also thought it was wrong. For example, when he asks the question, "Can the existence of God be proved?" the reason he gives for saying that it can is very simply that St. Paul in Scripture says that it can. Which is simply to say that it is pretty clear that before Aquinas has established whether the existence of God can be proved or not, he has committed himself to trusting Scripture as

³ W. K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," from *Lectures and Essays* (1879).

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.2. a.2.

the word of God, sufficient to provide him a way and the truth. Thus, for Aquinas it is not at all obvious that belief in God must be warranted before we can have faith in God; rather, for him faith precedes belief. For Clifford, the order is reversed.

Now why Aquinas and Clifford differ is important to understand, for their disagreement lies chiefly in their characterization and understanding of the nature of faith and the problem involved in Pascal's advice. Consider the sort of air that talk like that of W. K. Clifford has. It gives a sense that one first stands apart from what one might be committed to, apart from what one might have faith in, and from that distance one simply surveys the landscape of possibilities. It is from that vantage point and after such a survey that one can legitimately then decide whether or not to commit oneself. Now, I should point out that this sort of process works fine when trying to determine whether or not a ship should sail. Indeed, as Clifford saw, it is ethically demanded. And it works fine for anything that we can survey and have knowledge about from a distant standpoint. It works fine in cases where engineering decisions have to be made; it works fine when arrangements for travel are undertaken; it works fine when one cooks dinner.

It even works fine when one is trying to determine answers to certain big questions such as whether life has meaning or not, for with those questions, too, one can stand off at a distance and add up the sum total of possibilities before making a decision as to one's commitment level.

But this method doesn't work very well at all with things that we don't have control over, or with things that we can only know by committing ourselves to them, things that we don't know all about ahead of time, things that we have to work with in order to know them. Thus, for example, it doesn't work at all well with people. When we want to get to know people better, we don't ask ahead of time what they are like, for the only way of finding out what they are really like is by dealing with them. And indeed, if they ever thought that we would refuse to deal with them until we had all the evidence in on them, it is likely that we would fail to get to know most things about them, including their telephone numbers. The person who tries to decide whether the institution of marriage is meaningful or not may reach an answer, but is not likely to get a husband or wife, for such a person fails to understand that what counts in marriage is nothing less than a full-fledged commitment to another person.

This method also doesn't work very well with God. For God is not a possibility we can survey; God is not even the sum of possibilities. God is not even the meaning of our lives; God is the creator of them and the Word that

upholds every thought we have, including thoughts about God and meaning. And for that very reason we can never stand back and survey the evidence, for whatever evidence there is, and whatever surveying might be done, is nothing more than what God has created and what God is at the very heart of. As the psalmist once sang, "O Lord, thou has searched me and known me! Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up; thou discernest my thoughts from afar. Thou . . . art acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my lips, thou, O Lord, knowest it already" (Ps. 139:1-4).

And because, as the psalmist understood, God is at the very center of our being, creating whatever being we might have, there is no standing apart from God and surveying the possibilities. There is with God, as with human beings, only responding to their presence. For their very existence addresses us and demands a response. What we then come to know of their existence very much depends on how we respond to that address.

Throughout his writings, St. Augustine frequently quotes a passage from Isaiah that he translates in this way: "Unless you have faith, you will not understand." Or, as it is sometimes put, from faith comes understanding. When Augustine pulled this quotation from Isaiah out, he did not mean by it that one simply had to accept certain things and that in time one might understand them. That is something you say only to children. What he meant was this: understanding, which is something much deeper and more profound than mere knowledge, or even reason itself, comes only when we respond with ourselves, our hearts and minds and bodies, to that by which we are addressed. It comes only when we respond with our commitment and trust. For Augustine, God's Word, the Word by which all things were created, addresses itself continually to the human heart. Our response to that Word, our faith in that Word, thus is the very beginning of our coming to understand—not understanding simply either the world or ourselves, but understanding at all. For what is understanding but the acceptance and love of all that is created? What is understanding but our commitment to what addresses us? We can know many things and reason about many things without loving them; we can reason about them and know them from great distances. But *understanding* them means accepting and loving them as God created them. It is only when we understand things in this way that we will ever know what we believe about them.

It is at this point that it is worth returning to Pascal's gambler and being reminded of an important reading that Diogenes Allen suggests for why Pascal gave out the advice he did to the gambler. As Allen notes, that advice is

the conclusion of a long argument about faith.⁵ Now in the beginning of it Pascal suggests, in a way that appeals to where the gambler's treasure is, that faith is a good bet, for, he says, if there is eternity, then by giving up all to believe in it one can reap an infinite reward. On the other hand, if there is no eternity, whatever one might thereby lose by living a life of faith is simply finite. Thus the expected return on this bet outweighs any possible loss one might incur. Now Pascal knew what he was talking about when he formulated the bet this way: After all, he virtually invented probability theory. But as the argument with the gambler goes on, the gambler simply cannot make the wager even though he sees clearly the rational advantages to it. Nowhere does he seem to doubt the rationality of the wager. In this sense, if one would compare him to Clifford's shipowner, he has seen the evidence and knows the risk *is* well worth it; he is *not* guilty of taking a bad risk, like the shipowner, at all. Yet as it turns out—and this is the real point—he can't make the bet, even though reason directs him to do so. Why? His life just won't turn itself that way, at least not by rational argument. Now the larger point Pascal wants to make is this: that reasoning about evidence, that is, reason itself, is not the gambler's problem, nor is it ever the problem with faith. The problem is in the gambler's heart and life, in his commitments. That is why Pascal recommends acting as if he believed; for the gambler's problem is one of action. It is only by responding, it is only by action, that this will ever wash clean. In this sense, Pascal saw as did Augustine and Aquinas that faith, that one's commitment, comes ahead of all else. It is of a different order. It is that which alone allows us to understand; it contributes to the flourishing of our reason.

II. THE CONTENT OF THEOLOGY

What this telling of Pascal's story shows is something about the nature of faith; it does not yet tell us what the nature of theology or theological reasoning is. And herein lies a problem. As Newman saw in the *Grammar of Assent*, faith is a "real" assent to a particular, unique, and concrete call. Theology, on the other hand, to the degree that it is rational, to the degree it is shared and discussed by other rational beings, is "notional," and deals with universal propositions.

⁵ Diogenes Allen, *Three Outsiders* (Cambridge: Cowley, 1983), 39–40. "The Wager Argument is thus used to show a particular kind of person who does not believe that it is his passions, not intellectual reasons, which hinder his belief, and Pascal offers him a way to overcome this particular barrier to belief. So the Wager Argument belongs to the level of the 'flesh,' which is below the level of the mind" (40).

The distinction between “real” and “notional” assent does not, I think, constitute an either/or, and I shall be concerned to show how it does not, in a later section of this essay. At this point, what needs to be shown is simply, given the nature of faith, which is a response of the whole person to a call on his or her life, what that means for the practice of theology as both a rational and a spiritual enterprise. In order to do so, let us consider a position that Austin Farrer took.⁶

Farrer recognized at the outset that it is fairly clear that serious continued thought about God does not come about because we have proposed “God” as a possible hypothesis among others to account for phenomena and have found inescapable evidence that makes us admit the hypothesis, like it or not. Rather, he argued, we hear about God, or perhaps apprehend the idea independently, and then entertain it. It is only after entertaining it in a sort of experimental way that we seek the evidence for it. Simply put, the intelligence, as befits its role in a thoughtful life, imagines what it would be like for there to be a God. This is a kind of faith—“initial faith,” he calls it.⁷ As it imagines what it would be like, it also comes to think of what sort of evidence would incline us to commit ourselves to the thought. But why should we continue to entertain it, much less commit ourselves wholeheartedly to it? Farrer argues here that at this point evidence is not irrelevant, but also points out that because of this initial faith we are in a subjective condition favorable to the reception of the evidence insofar as the evidence is revealed by our sympathy to receiving it.⁸ This sympathy, though, does not replace evidence, but only inclines us to consider it. We thus continue the experiment, he thinks, because of the evidence.

But what is the evidence? Well, let us first look at what the idea of God is that it is supposed to support. God, if he is God as theists present him, is at least creator, sustainer, and perfectly good, and as such the alpha and omega of our lives. This is important, for in experimenting with the idea of God we are not experimenting with the possible existence of an item in the world, but with an entire picture of the world. And, as Farrer adds, this picture carries with it a number of built-in attitudes. For example, to experiment in thinking God is to experiment in thinking oneself God’s creature and finding in God the very meaning and purpose of our existence and the existence of all that is. Already we see that theology is not, as Farrer later pointed out, really in the range of the sciences, which view the world with a necessarily limited

⁶ A position for which, we might add, he admits he was deeply indebted to Diogenes Allen.

⁷ Austin Farrer, *Saving Belief* (New York: Morehouse-Barlow, 1964), chap. 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

methodological perspective or from a disinterested distance; rather, it is a surveying of the whole in its relation to the creator. In that case, only certain sorts of evidence are even appropriate for convincing us of God's existence. One sort is that which Farrer sought to explicate in *Finite and Infinite*, namely, that the world is capable of being read as the effect of a first cause, and that it even demands such a reading.

Yet as Farrer went on to explain in his last major work, *Faith and Speculation*, that is not the only evidence; in fact, it is actually only correlative to the evidence by which believers are actually convinced. *That* evidence is far more personal and the sort that comes from living the life of faith; or, in other words, it is experimental evidence. It is the evidence of having sought for God's goodness and having found it in one's life. As Farrer succinctly put it: "The Gospel offers God to me as good, not simply as fact. In embracing the good I am convinced of the fact."⁹ Simply put, I am motivated by a good that I desire, which is promised to come from the life of faith; as I pursue that good, I find that it is, indeed, forthcoming.

Now there are two good reasons for Farrer's embracing this position. The first is related to his notion of "initial faith." The believer in experimenting with the idea of God is dealing with a question of whether or not to submit his or her will to a creator. What will motivate the believer to do so is less the initial certitude that there exists such a being, than the importance of religious interest, and what we look for to confirm that we have actually got hold of anything real in faith is also going to be religious. Thus the position of *Faith and Speculation* far more closely represents how God is actually thought of by theists.

The second reason has to do with what Farrer by this time had clearly understood, that the metaphysical defense contained in *Finite and Infinite* relied on a metaphor of vision that allowed us to think that an idea's sheer luminosity gives us knowledge.¹⁰ But this he later thought was a mistake. Instead, he now argued, knowledge arises only from interaction with the object of thought. Therefore, there is "no thought about reality about which we can do nothing but think."¹¹ If, then, there is to be knowledge of God, it must come from interaction with God. The position that the believer finds warrant for continued belief from his or her experience of goodness received thus allows us to discuss faith as an empirical question and therefore as a question of real knowledge. It also allows us to see and discuss faith as

⁹ Austin Farrer, *Faith and Speculation* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 10.

¹⁰ Jeffrey Eaton, *The Logic of Theism* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1980), 35.

¹¹ Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 22.

believers actually practice it, or think they practice it—that is, as interaction with God.

Now, as Farrer clearly saw, this position does not philosophically justify belief; it only indicates that investigation ought not to be unrelated to the believer's actual reasons. But rather than attempting justification of such belief, we need to note one corollary. On Farrer's empirical demand, the substance of the thought of God is not a bare ideal. Rather, as he says, the only thing that can give substance to our thought of God is "an experience which employs our activity in relation to God, where that activity is something other than thought itself."¹² It is not that we cannot imagine the idea of God otherwise, but rather since the reason for bothering with God is salvation, and bothering with it *is* committing oneself to a personal will, the only way in which we would think of God is in terms of our experience of his action as it has enjoined our action. The content, then, of our thought about God is derived empirically.

This does not mean, though, that we can see where and how God's action has influenced our lives; Farrer insisted the evidence of our experience of God lies in our past, and "our thought of God is the summary of a tale which relates the actions of God."¹³ Our evidence for God is the blessings we have received; but unless we crudely assume that those blessings are lottery winnings for which we have prayed, we understand them only after a period; indeed, a change in our understanding may well be the most important sort of evidence that we could have. Augustine's tale of his life and his conversion is clear witness to this.

At this point, though, we have a first important connection of theology to spirituality. If theology has any real content (as opposed to a strictly abstract content), it is derived from the improvement of spirit that believers have claimed is the result of God's action. We also have reason to think that theologians might have a strong interest in linking theology and spirituality in an ongoing enterprise, for if spirituality is at the root of theology and is a concern for salvation, one would hope that continued thought on God would have something to do with salvation.

III. THE THOUGHT OF GOD IS GOD

But how? Since we have shown that theology ought to be linked to spiritual experience, and that it is in some sense notional, it would appear that theology

¹² Ibid., 28.

¹³ Ibid., 35.

precisely is "critical reflection on religious experience," whether one's own or somebody else's. Theology may simply be a matter of spending experiential capital, and not investing it. So why is not theology inevitably a stepping back from the idea of God, instead of an engagement with it?

Initially, we may simply observe that the personal engagement of the theological thinker is required at least insofar as it is the case that unless the thinker is in a position to see the evidence of faith as evidence, he or she simply will not have much of an idea of its worth or what to do with it. Personal acquaintance is invaluable. This suggestion, of course, raises the specter of fideism, and I shall want to say something about that below. But at this point, suffice it to note that what is being suggested is little different from Aquinas's procedure in the *Summa Theologiae*, when he argued (I, q. 1) that revealed propositions, which cannot be demonstrated but are only taken in faith, could serve as first principles in theological reasoning. It is a matter of reason to deduce things from them, a matter of faith to know and to care that they are indeed the first principles. This, of course, makes theology at least a matter of articulating the faith in notional language. But it also doesn't quite leave its religious basis. Borrowing a distinction from Boethius, while this makes theology a matter of *speculativo* (an intellectual discipline) and not *speculatio* (spiritual gazing or contemplation)¹⁴ as it had been in, say, Augustine, it is not entirely divorced from this grounding in the practice in faith.¹⁵

But the link I want to establish between theology and the spiritual is even stronger than this. What I want to find is a way by which we can conceive continued thought of God as *spiritually fecund*. Here I would like to approach this question by showing how the dynamics of faith are such that they draw thought into the life of faith by showing that because faith is concerned with spiritual fecundity, that is, with multiplication of the good it is committed to, it will seek to multiply that good in thought. The basis of my argument is taken from threads that are interwoven throughout the notebooks of Simone Weil.

¹⁴ This distinction is cited in Edward Farley's consideration of the problem of spirituality in *Theologia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 39.

¹⁵ Cf. G. R. Evans's comment on this change and development in the nature of theology: "The fire and energy with which they worked upon the new academic discipline of theology came from something more than intellectual curiosity, strong though that was in many of them. Theology has an importance for the believer which sets it apart from all other disciplines of mind. The tendency for the academic study of theology to shed the devotional and contemplative concomitants which accompanied exercises in speculative theology within the monastic tradition should not be allowed to blind us to the continuing association of all these elements in the minds of individual scholars" (*Old Arts and New Theology* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980], 215).

Within Weil's writings there are a number of references to what she calls a "proof by perfection."¹⁶ It is, Weil thinks, the only valid proof there is of God. Briefly stated, it runs like this: It is only by desiring something perfect that I am made any better. If what I desire is unreal, it clearly has no power to effect anything. If it is imaginary, that is effective only psychologically; it is no better than its source, the imager. If, however, in the course of desiring I am made better, then this something that draws me is real. Although Weil in places where she speaks of this proof does not say what counts as real effect, elsewhere she makes it very clear. Even as Aquinas took Paul's phrase "faith working through love" as defining the form of faith, so in her own way does Weil. Faith is, for her, the ability to sacrifice our personal perspective and egos for the life of others. Since for her the will is a part of that ego, any such real sacrifice would not be in the will's possibilities of self-realization. If the sacrifice is made anyhow, it must be made out of a source of action that is beyond our wills.

Where Weil understands the certainty of this proof to lie is obviously not in its syllogistic conclusion. In fact, it is not a propositional proof at all—she is giving a phenomenology of how we, in fact, are convinced. Thus the certainty involved is personal and experimental, and it arises only from engaging by desire the object of thought. In this case she is really talking about something like the "grammar" of thinking about God. The key to understanding what Weil intends by this line of thought lies in what she sees as the unfolding of our relation to perfection, a relation, she thinks, that involves the unique fact that the desire of true perfection is always effective. As she strongly puts it: "Whereas the desire for gold is not the same thing as gold, the desire for good is itself good."¹⁷ Let us unpack this thought.

Initially, Weil thinks the idea that God is perfectly good and even reality is basically a definition. It simply stays at that, though, unless we can engage that perfection. But, she thinks, engagement would appear to present us with a dilemma. On the one hand, if God is perfectly good, we cannot make a single step toward grasping that good because doing so inevitably misfires. It misfires because it indicates a desire not for the good itself but for an ersatz good. This is to say, we think that good could be made better if *we* possessed it, which is also to say that it is not perfect but could stand improvement. Yet, on the other hand, if God does not engage us, God is either not perfectly good

¹⁶ See S. Weil, *Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de dieu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 136; *Notebooks* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), 434; *First and Last Notebooks* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 342.

¹⁷ Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 316. Note: Weil tends to use "God" and "Good" somewhat interchangeably.

or does not actually encompass reality. This is to say that a part of the world, namely us, is not encompassed by God.

The solution to this dilemma, which is characteristic of Weil's thought, comes not in our actually moving toward God, but in God moving toward us. Thus the Good grasps us and makes us over; the Good tailors us to it, we do not adjust it to our life. As Weil puts it, God descends to meet our need. We are not left entirely out of this action, for what causes that descent is our desire. However, this is a "deep desire," which is neither a bare wish nor a striving to possess; rather, it involves something she calls "non-active action." It is nonactive insofar as it indicates a matter of passivity on our part to God's action—we do not strive; but it is action insofar as it actually engages our being in the world. Or, using terms she otherwise employs, this desire is found in steadfast attention to God and waiting upon God. Although her language is highly charged, her point is that the desire for goodness is itself a form of goodness. The idea is clear, for such a stance of attention to the good wants the good for itself on no other conditions than those which the good supplies. That in itself is good.

This solution, however, is still no more than a definition that convinces by its luminosity. The key to unlocking the door to concreteness lies in an intermediary term, "faith." Once again, though, we need to consider carefully Weil's own peculiar usage of terms. Weil, as she makes clear in numerous places, does not consider faith as an intellectual adherence to anything;¹⁸ rather, she calls it a "submission of those parts [of the soul] which have no contact with God to the one which has."¹⁹ What this means is simply that faith is a consent of the whole person to God's action. Not all of what we think, feel, and do is directed toward perfection; some of it is simply directed to getting across the street. Where faith enters is when all of our life is ordered to our deep desire for the good. On the one hand, this means that we do nothing to oppose the fulfillment of desire, and on the other it means that our entire being is engaged by the object of desire even though not everything in us is concerned directly with it.

Weil's usage of the term "faith," of course, has its connections with the traditional religious sense of faith as trust. But she develops the idea further by pointing out *why* we trust and how that involves our very being, namely, in

¹⁸ E.g., "Last Text," in S. Weil, *Gateway to God*, ed. David Raper (New York: Crossroad, 1982): "When I say 'I believe' I do not mean that I take over for myself what the Church says on these matters, affirming them as one might affirm empirical facts or geometrical theorems, but that through love, I hold on to the perfect, unseizable, truth which these mysteries contain, and that I try to open my soul to it so that its light may penetrate into me" (62).

¹⁹ Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, 132.

order that the good in which we trust might be expanded. Or, more accurately, that trust is precisely what refuses to be anything but what God makes of it; it is a life given over to God's good. She notes that the relevant article of faith is "concerned with fecundity, with the self-multiplying faculty of every desire for good."²⁰ In this sense, faith is not only a consent of the whole person to God's action, it is a consent motivated by the desire that God's goodness might be shed abroad, in and through us and even despite us. Yet, Weil adds, this is nevertheless faith, because we do not know, prior to our commitment, that the Good is actually fecund and will be effective; it is only by our experience of having been made better by having chosen to live this way that we are convinced of its efficacy. Again there is no direct observation of God's action, for it is seen only in the end result. Ironically, though, once we actually desire it, it is embodied and shed abroad not only because we as embodied agents desire it but because as embodied agents we act on it. It is only a seeming paradox, then, when Weil says that "faith creates the truth to which it adheres."²¹ Faith creates that truth in that it is an effect of the fecundity of the good. Faith *is* a good, made by the Good.

Now, what can we conclude for the relation of spirituality and theology given this analysis of the believer's presumed engagement with God? Let us first look at what Weil thought the relation was.

Weil, despite her own deep Platonism, was quite willing to distinguish between the intellect and the spirit and to argue that the direct concern of the intellect was with furthering a universal, but therefore abstract, method and that this forbade it direct access to God. Like Newman, she saw intellect as dealing with the notional, and not the particular or concrete, and God is particular and unique. God and God's Word are not instances of any general thought. Yet, she thought, the intellect in the life of faith can nevertheless operate as a sort of mediator between the spirit and the body. On the one hand, this means that although hard, critical thought is limited to an understanding of the finite world, the world it contemplates and orders the body for action in is a world of purpose and goodness that the spirit has apprehended and presented to it. On the other hand, whenever the intelligence grasps the world as an ordered whole it suggests to the spirit the possibility of a transcendent, creative purpose that the spirit may then grasp. These two operations of the intellect are not exclusive acts, however, but ones that interpenetrate. Thus, at the same time, that thought can be inspired to that inspiration. Or, in our terms, theology as critical thought, even as a

²⁰ Ibid., 307.

²¹ Ibid., 291.

second-order discipline, if it is indeed always that, can still be the means of intellectually ordering a vision of the spirit and creating a world for faithful action, and also a means by which the spirit can find increased opportunity to wait upon God's action.

Weil's way of putting this involves saying things in a way that is strong drink for the contemporary theologian or philosopher. But this can also be put another way that is more modest. It is this: If, as Weil suggests, the movement of faith is a submission of the whole person, including the intellect, to an active engagement with God, then it must be understood that this movement is motivated by a desire for the eternal generation of the good. Whether or not faith has actually engaged God is only known experimentally. Nevertheless, this means not only as Farrer suggested, that the religious idea of God *begins* in experience, but that it is the inherent motivation of faith itself to coordinate all of one's being, including one's thought, in such a way that the perfection that it originally engaged is shed abroad both in one's own being and in the world at large. It is the coordination of thought and life; it is "faith working through love."

IV. THEOLOGY AND THE INNER WORD

I would like to put this yet another way, a way that is far more ancient, and which may well be the seed of its later bloom. In the writings of St. Augustine, the good bishop develops the notion of what he calls an "inner word." What he means by the "inner word" is a word formed in the soul that stands behind the vocally expressed word that issues from the mouth and that falls upon the ear. The importance of that inner word is that it contains our knowledge and appreciation and concern for what we say.

Now the function of the inner word in Augustine's thought is not as an inner explanation for what we say; talking is not a matter of translating from "mentalese" to Latin or English. Rather, Augustine recognized, what we say is not just out there, and it is not neutral. There is a sort of shape or form to what we say that involves us and gives us, the thinkers, away in what is thought and said. This is understandable, since for Augustine what constitutes knowledge in the mind of the thinker is a unity of understanding, memory, and will. What knowledge is, therefore, is not simply a fact, but the mind of the thinker as well. And what is known, insofar as it is known, is in an important sense the shape of the thing itself, consented to and entertained by the mind, shaping the mind in relation to it.

There are, I suppose, huge epistemological issues that can be raised here. But they are not the most important ones at all. What I am concerned to think

about is what the personal and moral dimensions of knowing are, given this sort of view of knowledge. Or, even more simply, I am concerned to note that there *are* personal and moral dimensions to knowing and that is what Augustine is after. And to the degree that there are such dimensions, it seems to me that knowing becomes a task not simply of knowing what is the case (after all, Augustine recognizes, the devil himself knows the existence of God, probably even better than most), but of forming a personal inner word that exhibits justice to what is known, and which thereby makes us just. The task of knowing in the fullest sense for Augustine—and I think for Weil and Pascal too—therefore is always a matter of becoming something ourselves, a matter of unifying our understanding, memory, and will. For often, Augustine recognized, the inner word we express is an expression of our own inner fragmentation, and what is known is shaped by selfish self-willing.

In the case of the moral virtues, and in the case of knowing God, to form that inner word is to become that very thing we know, for to know these things is not simply to know something, it is to have a certain shape to what else we know, it is to be a certain way ourselves. Thus Augustine explains: “The word conceived and the word born are the very same when the will finds rest in knowledge itself, as is the case in the love of spiritual things. For instance, he who knows righteousness perfectly, and loves it perfectly, is already righteous.”²² To know God is to know God’s word and to love it, and in so doing, it is to make that word our inner word, the very shape of our lives; it gives shape to all the words we speak. To know God as the Selfsame, to know the Selfsame, “that which always exists in the same way; that which is not now one thing and again a different thing,”²³ is to be healed of our own fragmentation of spirit.

Now if theology actually believes that it has an object of knowledge and that that object is God, then it seems that something like what Weil and Augustine are pointing to is right. Namely, it appears that the ultimate task of theology is transformation of the thinker, of fitting him or her to the inner life of God. Otherwise, it is nothing more than what is insidiously called “religious studies” in most university curricula, one of the few intellectual disciplines where professors do not have to believe that they have a real subject matter or that they need to be proficient practitioners.

This can be put less contentiously by stating briefly what differences this might make to the intellectual discipline of theology. (The personal difference to the thinker should be obvious by this point.)

²² Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Book IX, chap. 9.

²³ Augustine, *Commentary on the Psalms*, Ps. 121, 3.5.

For much of modernity, theology, once queen of the sciences, has had to establish itself as a science at all. No longer that which defines "knowledge," its intellectual worth has been measured by scientific methodology. Even in the presently more generous time of postpositivism, a time when theology has been conceded some kind of distinctive subject matter, it has faced attempts to make it in the image of the established natural sciences, even by its friends. Thus, for example, Wolfhart Pannenberg has called for "a general concept of science . . . which would . . . transcend particularity and unite theology and the other sciences."²⁴ Ian Barbour, in a well-meaning attempt to find some sort of rapprochement between science and religion, has made theology "critical reflection on the life and thought of the religious community . . . [whose] context is always the worshipping community."²⁵ It is in the way it organizes its knowledge, in its models, that Barbour finds links to science and sees the possibility of fruitful interaction between theological and scientific knowledge.

Now, as I have described matters, there may well be much to be harvested from such suggestions. Insofar as theology is a notional and an intellectual discipline it includes critical thought. Insofar as it is a function of faith it does too, for it seeks the multiplication of the good, in the intellect as much as in anything. This includes critical thought, to the extent that it enables the multiplication of the good through teaching, apologetics, exegesis, and even interreligious dialogue. In this sense faith is not innately unscientific, dogmatic, and credulous. In fact, insofar as it is earnestly attentive to unexpected movements of God's action in multiplying his good, it can positively invite method, freedom of opinion, and critical judgment so that its object may be universal.

Nevertheless, to leave it at that level is to understand things at what will be a secondary level. It may well be to leave intact numerous assumed mischaracterizations of both faith and theology. This includes taking belief to precede faith, and to take faith as *chiefly* an intellectual position opposed to knowledge, which can be discussed strictly notionally. In each of these cases, the sense that faith is also an order of the heart that reason does not know (Pascal), or an inner word, the shape of our minds and knowledge (Augustine), or the ordering of our lives in light of the Good we desire (Weil) is ignored.

In this sense, what *its* real place in intellectual life is may well be ignored, as well as consequently what it has to offer to thought. What that contribution

²⁴ W. Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 19.

²⁵ Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990), 267.

might be can be seen in a point that Weil makes in *The Need for Roots*. In a section dedicated to trying to find ways that human life can be rerooted in the world of necessity, and by its mediation, in the life of God, Weil suggests that the key to much of modern science is understanding its lack of motivation to think on any sort of overarching Good, its failure to think about the relation of the Necessary to the Good. Thus when modern science studies truth by studying the web of necessity of which the universe is composed, as it ought, it has left matters at that: blind, brute necessity. It has not put the surveying intellect and the order it discerns within the world within any larger context; it has not sought to think about how its symbolic world signals an overarching order that is the presence of the Good. And Weil thinks it does, or should, signal such an order. She writes: "The order of the world is the same as the beauty of the world. . . . It is one and the same thing, which with respect to God is eternal Wisdom; with respect to the universe, perfect obedience; with respect to love, beauty; with respect to our intelligence, balance of necessary relations; with respect to our flesh, brutal force."²⁶ The point applied to theology is this: The primary importance of theology (or philosophy, as Plato, Epictetus, and Augustine called it) is not simply to contribute to the construction of intellectual representations of the world, although it can do that too; it is to submit them and to submit the representing mind, to a higher order. It is to make us recognize that there is no knowledge worth having that does not involve self-knowledge or moral and spiritual questions. It is to force us to recognize another dimension to thought, which in the modern world has been so monodimensional.

That is how Plato, Augustine, Epictetus, Pascal, and Weil approached knowledge. That is what I learned from Dick Allen at a lunch table.

²⁶ S. Weil, *The Need for Roots* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 281.

Some Reflections on Sphere Sovereignty

by RICHARD J. MOUW

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DURING THE years when I regularly taught a course in Social and Political Philosophy at Calvin College, I required my students to read substantial portions of Abraham Kuyper's 1898 Stone Lectures. In my class discussions, I focused especially on his lecture on "Calvinism and Politics," spending considerable time talking about his theory of sphere sovereignty. There was one student, however, who apparently paid no attention to what went on in this part of the course, though this did not keep him from offering a rather bold account of what he imagined that Kuyper might be saying on the subject. In response to a question on the final exam inviting students to reflect critically on a major theme in Kuyper's social thought, this young man gave a summary of what he took to be Kuyper's espousal of "spear sovereignty." As a Calvinist, this student opined, Kuyper believed that governments have the power of the sword. Sinful people will never do anything good unless they have a spear aimed at them, he argued. So Kuyper believed that human society can only be held together by the fear of punishment. Thus, in a sinful world the governmental spear must be sovereign.

Though his answer was quite misguided, the student's brief account of the nature of political authority did bear some clear traces of Calvinist influence. Romans 13 has been a key text for the followers of John Calvin in their portrayal of the role of government—to the point that a slightly expanded paraphrase of that biblical passage has sometimes sufficed as a way of stating the Christian perspective on political life. In drawing this summary out of his

Calvinist memory bank, however, the student failed to capture even a few of the basic nuances of Kuyperian social thought. I want to emphasize the word "social" in this regard, for in his use of the sphere-sovereignty motif, Kuyper was more interested in viewing governmental authority against the larger tapestry of human interaction than he was in providing a detailed theory of the proper functionings of government.

The need to keep government in its proper place is a topic that Kuyper addressed with considerable passion in "Calvinism and Politics." The creation order, he argued, displays a rich variety of societal spheres. Since all of these spheres have the same origin in "the divine mandate," political authority must respect the fact that each of the other spheres has its own integrity. "Neither the life of science nor of art, nor of agriculture, nor of industry, nor of commerce, nor of navigation, nor of the family, nor of human relationship may be coerced to suit itself to the grace of government," says Kuyper. "The State may never become an octopus, which stifles the whole of life." He then abruptly switches metaphors and emphasizes that the political government "must occupy its own place, on its own root, among all the others trees of the forest, and thus it has to honor and maintain every form of life which grows independently in its own sacred autonomy."¹

There is much in just these few lines from Kuyper that suggests some clear links to themes that loom large in our contemporary discussions about societal well-being. It is important to acknowledge these links and to recognize the common ground that Kuyper shares with those who have been thinking much in recent years about "the good society." Yet Kuyper's sphere-sovereignty perspective cannot simply be subsumed under the categories that dominate our present-day discussions, and it is a good thing to be clear about why this is so if we are to make proper use of Kuyper's societal vision in our contemporary context. As Jacob Klapwijk has insisted, while Kuyper's sphere-sovereignty concept "deserves a new chance in our time," this requires subjecting Kuyper's "bits and pieces" to considerable refinement in the light of contemporary questions and concerns.²

I will not provide all that necessary clarification here, but I do hope to contribute something to that larger project. In what follows, I will briefly discuss the relationship of Kuyper's idea of sphere sovereignty to three themes that have been given much attention in recent years and that seem to have some connections to the sphere-sovereignty notion: the insistence in

¹ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 96-7.

² Jacob Klapwijk, "The Struggle for a Christian Philosophy: Another Look at Dooyeweerd," *The Reformed Journal* 30 (1980), 15.

some quarters on minimal government; the current interest in mediating structures; and the renewed emphasis in contemporary Christian thought on the Roman Catholic idea of subsidiarity. I will then look at some of the broad theological-philosophical commitments that in my view were at work in Kuyper's strong advocacy of the sphere-sovereignty conception. In all of this, I will focus especially on how these commitments can help Christians in our own day who are interested in developing the kind of overall perspective on societal life that Kuyper pointed us to in his pronouncements about sphere sovereignty.

I. THE LIMITS OF GOVERNMENT

Consider, first, the contemporary version of the desire to limit the role of government. At first glance, Kuyper would seem to be a strong ally in this cause. In the remarks I quoted from his Stone Lecture, for example, he is obviously concerned to keep the government from undue intrusion in the affairs of the other spheres. The key term here is "undue." Having used the metaphors of the tree whose roots spread too far and of the grasping octopus, Kuyper quickly goes on to ask: "Does this mean that the government has no right *whatever* of interference in these autonomous spheres of life?" His answer is: "Not at all." Government, he explains, has a "threefold right and duty": first, to adjudicate disputes between spheres, "compel[ling] mutual regard for the boundary-lines of each"; second, to defend the weak against the strong within each sphere; and third, to exercise the coercive power necessary to guarantee that citizens "bear *personal* and *financial* burdens for the maintenance of the natural unity of the State."³

Kuyper's three qualifications here are significant ones. They not only suggest what governments may do, but they point to some governmental duties. In this regard, Kuyper does actually work with a kind of "sphere-sovereignty" notion. Government has a special role to play among the spheres, seeing to it that the relationships among and within the spheres are properly ordered. This ordering function is an active one. Indeed, one can make room—given the way Kuyper actually states his three qualifications—for a fairly energetic interventionist pattern by government.

The first function that Kuyper mentions in specifying government's threefold right and duty is the adjudication of *inter*-sphere boundary disputes. Obvious examples here would be ones where an "adult" bookstore attempts to set up shop and display its wares on a street heavily traveled by school

³ Kuyper, *Lectures*, 97.

children, or where a religious group wants to use a public-university meeting room to engage in worship activities. Other, more subtle, claims of alleged boundary violation could also be considered. Suppose, for example, that parents want limits placed on TV advertising of fast-food products, on the grounds that such messages invade the home with propagandizing on behalf of poor nutrition. There is nothing in Kuyper's formulation that tells us how the government ought to decide in such cases; but he does seem to imply that the government has a proper adjudicatory role to play in these kinds of situations.

The second qualification has to do with *intra*-sphere conflict: The government is obliged to protect the weak from the strong within each sphere. Here again, there are obvious cases: governments may, for example, intervene in families where spouse- or child-abuse occurs, or in manufacturing plants where there are oppressive workplace conditions. But this qualification can also be interpreted to include less overt patterns of perceived harm, of the sort frequently associated these days with the more subtle varieties of alleged "sexual harassment."

Kuyper's third qualification has to do with what we might think of as *trans*-spherical patterns. His concern here can be illustrated by means of a simple example: roads. Thoroughfares are used to conduct the affairs of any number of spheres. Families pile into their vans to head for picnics. Heads of state travel to ceremonies in motorcades. Business leaders take cabs to meetings. Team players are bused to the stadium. Roads serve all the spheres, and everyone, regardless of status in a particular sphere, has an interest in the maintenance of appropriate patterns of transport. It is the task of the state to see to it that we all do our part to maintain a good road system.

While Kuyper wanted to keep the state in its place, then, he also affirms that government has a right and duty to reach from that place into the other spheres, regulating inter-, intra-, and trans-spherical patterns. One can surely raise questions about how often and how far a government may reach in pursuing these obligations. Those are good and important questions. They are not to be decided, however, simply by pointing to the fact of sphere sovereignty, as Kuyper employs that idea with reference to the proper patterns of political authority.

II. SPHERES AND MEDIATING STRUCTURES

A number of North-American social critics have emphasized in recent years the important role that "mediating structures" play in providing a buffer zone between the individual and the state. Peter Berger put the case most clearly

when he argued that the "megastructures" of societal life cannot work for human flourishing without assistance from other collective entities. States and corporations need to look "below" themselves for "moral sustenance," providing room for the significant influence of those "living subcultures from which people derive meaning and identity."⁴ Such entities protect us from the all-encompassing tendencies of the state, on the one hand, and from an isolated individualism, on the other.

On one level, this comports well with some of Kuyper's own practical concerns. Kuyper, however, also wanted to highlight certain themes that are not touched on in many of the present-day discussions of mediating structures. For one thing, Kuyper is not merely interested in strengthening mediating structures; he also wants to understand how these so-called mediating structures are themselves organizational manifestations of more basic spheres of interaction. For him, it is important to see the ways in which, say, familial relations are very different from ecclesial ones, or how artistic activity differs from scientific investigation. Kuyper focuses on the reality of a variety of societal entities that are "below" the state, not primarily because they can play an important role in curbing the power of government, but because they also display diverse patterns of human interaction that are important elements in God's structuring of the creation. Whether it is good to have Rotary Clubs and Parent Teacher Associations is not as important a question for Kuyper as whether art and religion and business and family life are granted their allotted place in the God-ordained scheme of things.

To be sure, Kuyper was never very precise as to what counted as a creational "sphere." The passage quoted from the Stone Lectures shows his lack of precision. It is not clear, for example, how navigation and agriculture deserve a separate status as distinct creational spheres in the same sense as science, art, commerce, industry, the family, and "human relationship" (by which he probably had in mind marriage and friendship) qualify. One sphere seems to differ from another in Kuyper's view by virtue of their different "points." Gordon Spykman has well summarized the Kuyperian conception: "Each sphere has its own identity, its own unique task, its own God-given prerogatives. On each God has conferred its own peculiar right of existence and reason for existence."⁵ The point of doing art is to display aesthetic

⁴ Peter Berger, "In Praise of Particularity: The Concept of Mediating Structures," in *Facing Up To Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 140.

⁵ Gordon J. Spykman, "Sphere Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition," in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. David E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 167.

excellence, while the point of science—a term that Kuyper uses broadly to cover all orderly intellectual investigation—is to advance the cause of knowledge. Economic activity aims at stewardship, just as politics aims at justice.

Corresponding to these different “points” is a diversity of authority patterns. The way in which a parent exercises authority over a child should be different from the way a legislator exercises authority over constituents, or a professor over students, or a coach over team players. This means, too, that the skills associated with a specific mode of authority do not automatically transfer to other spheres. Someone might be a good parent but a poor politician or bishop. Again, it was more important for Kuyper that this diversity be recognized and respected than that particular organizational structures serve the practical function of curbing tendencies toward statism.

III. SPHERES AND SUBSIDIARITY

The idea of sphere sovereignty is often mentioned in the same breath with the Roman Catholic principle of subsidiarity. Nelson Gonzalez makes the equation in a recent article, when he refers to “subsidiarity or sphere sovereignty, as known in the Reformed tradition,” as a “foundational Christian Democratic principle.” As Gonzalez states the principle, the link is, for practical purposes, a helpful one. “Because politics is for the good of the person,” he explains, “the state should never do for ‘mediating structures,’ such as churches, neighborhoods, families, and schools, what they can do for themselves.”⁶

All things considered, though, the relationship between subsidiarity and sphere sovereignty is not an exact fit. For one thing, Calvinist commentators often emphasize the fact that while Roman Catholics sometimes use the principle of subsidiarity to defend decentralized patterns within a given sphere, Kuyper appealed to sphere sovereignty only as a way of clarifying the differences among spheres. While this is a helpful observation for illustrating the lack of a perfect fit, it is not necessary to make too much of it. In his study of the use of subsidiarity in Catholic ecclesiology, Ad Leys provides examples of ways in which the principle has been employed by Catholics to lay out the proper relations between the papacy and the episcopacy.⁷ Though Kuyper did not intend sphere sovereignty to make a similar point about Protestant church

⁶ Nelson R. Gonzalez, “The European Christian Democratic Tradition: A Neglected Font of Political Wisdom,” *Regeneration Quarterly* 2 (1996), 30.

⁷ Ad Leys, *Ecclesiological Impacts of the Principle of Subsidiarity*, trans. A. van Santvoord (Kampen: Kok, 1995).

life, he did, in fact, harbor strong anti-hierarchical sentiments in his understanding of the relationship of local churches to broader ecclesiastical bodies;⁸ in his Stone Lecture on politics, he even referred to "the social life of cities and villages" as forming "a separate sphere of existence . . . which therefore must be autonomous."⁹ While these localist sympathies do not, strictly speaking, follow from his notion of sphere sovereignty, it is difficult to think that there is no spillover from Kuyper's prescriptions about inter-sphere relations to his views on intra-sphere patterns.

More interesting is the fact that some Kuyperians have insisted that the apparent commonalities between sphere sovereignty and subsidiarity mask very deep philosophical differences. That is certainly the way Herman Dooyeweerd views the relationship. He sees the Roman Catholic view as a hierarchical scheme in which the state is "the totality of natural society," with the church representing an even higher manifestation "of christian society in its supranatural perfection."¹⁰ In such a view, as Dooyeweerd describes it, communities such as family, university, and corporation are lower parts of these higher organic unities: Families are organically subordinate to the state, and the state to the church. The principle of subsidiarity, then, serves only as a kind of pragmatic limitation on the real authority of church and state, dictating that whenever possible the lower entities should be allowed to function without interference from higher authorities. By way of contrast, Dooyeweerd insists, sphere sovereignty does not merely prescribe a practical "hands off" policy; rather, the boundaries that separate the spheres are a part of the very nature of things. Neither the state nor the church has any business viewing the other spheres as somehow under them. Kuyper's scheme places "the different spheres of life alongside each other," finding their unity not in some "higher" visible community but in the ordering of a creation that is ruled by God.¹¹

I am not concerned here to defend the details of Dooyeweerd's interpretation of the deeper intentions of subsidiarity thinking. My own sense is that his way of drawing the contrast is a bit too stark.¹² But his critique does give clear

⁸ For an account of Kuyper's views in this area, see Cornelius Veenhof, "Church Polity in 1886 and 1944," in *Seeking our Brothers in the Light: A Plea for Reformed Ecumenicity*, ed. Theodore Plantinga (Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1992), 123-9.

⁹ Kuyper, *Lectures*, 96.

¹⁰ Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options*, ed. Mark Vander Vennen and Bernard Zylstra, trans. John Kraay (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979), 127.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹² For a more nuanced Kuyperian critique than Dooyeweerd's, along with suggestions for reformulating the principle of subsidiarity in less "hierarchical" terms, see Jonathan Chaplin, "Subsidiarity as a Political Norm," in *Political Theory and Christian Vision: Essays in*

expression to the way in which Kuyper and his followers have wanted to emphasize the fact that each of the created spheres has its own integrity, with its own unique mandate from the Creator—an emphasis that is not usually found in Roman Catholic expositions of subsidiarity. To use a favorite phrase of Kuyper's, each sphere exists *coram deo*, standing in an unmediated relationship to the rule of God.

IV. KUYPER'S THEOLOGICAL-PHILOSOPHICAL COMMITMENTS

These brief observations on the differences between Kuyper's perspective and some kindred themes in more recent Christian social thought are meant to emphasize the fact that Kuyper was not motivated by exactly the same concerns as those contemporary thinkers who, in Klapwijk's words, "prefer to explain the diversity of social structures as a purely pragmatic outcome of historical evolution or as a functional decentralization of the authority of the state."¹³ Kuyper was guided by some very basic theological-philosophical commitments that he considered to be "principal" in character. In briefly examining a few of these key commitments here, I am interested not only in the way they functioned in shaping Kuyper's thought, but also in their contemporary relevance. Kuyper obviously took these matters seriously, but why should we? Is the larger perspective that shaped his sphere-sovereignty program still a viable way of viewing things in our own cultural context?

I begin with Kuyper's strong emphasis on culture as an integral dimension of the original creation. Without paying attention to this theme it is impossible to understand his views about how the spheres relate to each other. I have already noted, for example, that while he surely wanted to keep the state in its place, he also wanted the proper role of other spheres of human interaction to be recognized and honored. This, in turn, presupposed a larger perspective, one that he considered to be a profoundly biblical vision of societal life. As Kuyper set forth his understanding of that perspective, he placed strong emphasis on the ordered creation as the fundamental context for grasping the proper place of any given sphere.

In the Kuyperian scheme, God invested the original creation with complex cultural potential, which human beings were expected to actualize. In a classic statement of this perspective, aptly entitled *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, Henry Van Til explained the Kuyperian understanding of the "cultural

Memory of Bernard Zylstra, eds. Jonathan Chaplin and Paul Marshall (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994), 81–100.

¹³ Klapwijk, "The Struggle for a Christian Philosophy," 13.

mandate" in Genesis 1 by arguing that the Creator's initial assignment to the first human pair—the directive to "fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28)—featured God's deep interest in the cultural development of the creation. God placed Adam and Eve, Van Til observed, into a "primary environment"—a Garden containing plant and animal life—with the expectation that they would impose upon this raw nature a "secondary environment," that is to say, a cultural one. By shaping artifacts and instituting patterns of interaction, created humanity would bring out creation's rich cultural potential, thus displaying God's multifaceted design—esthetic, familial, economic, political, and so on—for the created order.¹⁴ This cultural mandate is an expression of God's own investment in cultural formation, and it has in no way been cancelled by the introduction of sin into the creation. Indeed, our sinfulness inevitably manifests itself in cultural terms: As a result of the Fall, cultural obedience was replaced by cultural disobedience, resulting in a distortion of the cultural activity for which we were created. To be redeemed from sin, then, is to be restored to the patterns of obedient cultural formation for which we were created.

This restorative motif looms large in the way Kuyper describes Christ's redemptive mission:

Can we imagine that at one time God willed to rule things in a certain moral order, but that now, in Christ, He wills to rule it otherwise? As though He were not the Eternal, the Unchangeable, Who, from the very hour of creation, even unto all eternity, had willed, wills, and shall will and maintain, one and the same firm moral world-order! Verily Christ has swept away the dust with which man's sinful limitations had covered up this world-order, and has made it glitter again in its original brilliancy . . . [T]he world-order remains just what it was from the beginning. It lays full claim, not only to the believer (as though less were required from the unbeliever), but to every human being and to all human relationships.¹⁵

Note that what is restored here, in Kuyper's way of stating the case, is a "world-order." God did not just invest the creation with cultural potentials and leave it up to us to do what we will in actualizing those potentials. Our cultural activity, in both its obedient and disobedient forms, occurs within a creation that is ordered culturally. That is true in at least two senses: God created a macro-ordering of diverse spheres of cultural interaction, and he gave to each of the individual spheres its own unique internal orderedness.

¹⁴ Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), 7.

¹⁵ Kuyper, *Lectures*, 71-2.

The fulfillment of the cultural mandate, therefore, requires the discovery and implementation of God's complex ordering design, both among and within the spheres.

In placing such a strong emphasis on order, Kuyper is exhibiting some rather basic Calvinist instincts. Sheldon Wolin has observed that Calvin was unique among the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers in insisting that societal life is divinely ordered. On Wolin's reading of Reformation thought, both Luther and the Anabaptists believed in a divinely ordered cosmos, but they saw extra-ecclesial social reality "as a dark, disordered mass trembling on the brink of anarchy and seemingly outside the beneficent order of God." In contrast, says Wolin, John Calvin insisted on reconciling "Christian cosmology" with "Christian sociology" by portraying all of social reality as under the ordering rule of God.¹⁶ Wolin may be overstating the case, but he is right at least about some overall emphases. Calvin and his followers have typically given more attention than other Protestants to the fact of a divinely instituted social order. Kuyper clearly stands in this tradition, emphasizing with other Calvinists the "spear-sovereignty" role of the state in ordering the rest of society.

This ordering task is not, however, simply a function of the "spear" of Romans 13:4. As Kuyper portrays the ordering role of government, it is more than a postlapsarian coercive necessity. What we experience as the state under fallen conditions is a manifestation of something that was already implicit in the original creation design. Even if the Fall had not occurred, Kuyper argues in his Stone Lecture on politics, there would have developed a need for government—not in the form of coercive nation-states, but as "one organic world-empire, with God as its King; exactly what is prophesied for the future which awaits us, when all sin shall have disappeared."¹⁷ Here government is not fundamentally a remedial response to human perversity, but a natural provision for the regulating or the ordering of the complexity of created cultural life.

The idea that politics as well as the diversity of other cultural spheres is a part of the original creation design is obviously basic to Kuyper's thought. But what are the grounds for believing in such a thing? While Kuyper and his followers say surprisingly little on this topic, choosing for the most part to explicate rather than provide a rationale for their scheme, there are occasional references to what they apparently view as a biblical grounding for the sphere-

¹⁶ Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1960), 180.

¹⁷ Kuyper, *Lectures*, 92.

sovereignty idea. Writings on sphere sovereignty, for example, often contain allusions to the descriptions in the Genesis story of plants and animals being created "after their own kind." Kuyper's colleague Herman Bavinck sprinkles his account of sphere sovereignty with these references.

Everything was created with its own nature and is based upon ordinances appointed by God for it. Sun and moon and stars have their own peculiar tasks; plants and animals and man have their own distinct natures. . . . Every creature received its own nature and its own existence, its own life and its own law of life . . . so all creatures carried in their own nature the principles and laws of their own development. . . . As creatures were given their own peculiar natures along with differences among them, so there are also differences in the laws by which they act and in the relationships which they sustain to each other.¹⁸

These comments illustrate the way in which Kuyperians often move rather quickly from relatively straightforward paraphrases of biblical references to the creation of plants, animals, and celestial bodies to more general comments about the larger patterns of created reality. For instance, at one point Bavinck refers to Psalm 148:6, where God is described as having "fixed [the] bounds" of various celestial bodies and angelic beings, to make the more general point that "God gave to all creatures a certain order, a law which they do not violate." He then quickly moves into an even more robust invocation of sphere sovereignty, observing that all creatures as such "differ in the area of both physical things and psychic things, in the intellectual and ethical realms, in the family and in society, in science and in art, in the domain of earth and in the domain of heaven."¹⁹

Kuyper himself provides the outline of an even larger rationale for sphere sovereignty, in his address at the founding of the *Vrije Universiteit*, when he inquires whether sphere sovereignty is derived "from the heart of Scripture and the treasury of Reformed life." Kuyper explains what gave rise to this conception in his thinking:

Should anyone ask whether "sphere sovereignty" is really derived from the heart of Scripture and the treasury of Reformed life, I would entreat him first of all to plumb the depths of the organic faith principle in Scripture, further to note Hebron's tribal law for David's coronation, to notice Elijah's resistance to Ahab's tyranny, the disciples' refusal to yield to

¹⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Kampen: Kok, 1928), various sections, as translated and quoted by Spykman, "Sphere Sovereignty," 179–82.

¹⁹ Spykman, "Sphere Sovereignty," 180.

Jerusalem's police regulations, and, not least, to listen to their Lord's maxim concerning what is God's and what is Caesar's. As to Reformed life, don't you know about Calvin's "lesser magistrates"? Isn't sphere sovereignty the basis for the entire presbyterian church order? Did not almost all Reformed nations incline toward a confederate form of government? Are not civil liberties most luxuriantly developed in Reformed lands? Can it be denied that domestic peace, decentralization, and municipal autonomy are best guaranteed even today among the heirs of Calvin?²⁰

Without examining in detail the biblical and historical examples that Kuyper cites here, it is most obvious that what they all have in common is that they illustrate in one way or another the separation of powers.

Is any of this convincing as a rationale for sphere sovereignty? In one sense, it obviously is not. It is one thing to note, in the spirit of Kuyper's list of examples, that God saw to it that the separate offices of prophet, priest, and king were distinguished in the life of ancient Israel, or that presbyterian polity assigns different functions to pastors, elders, and deacons, and quite another thing to insist that God shaped the world in such a way that, say, universities would have different creational mandates than churches. Similarly, Bavinck's comments about creation contain some significant leaps: He begins with rather straightforward paraphrases of biblical references to the peculiar natures and boundaries of specific created entities, moves from there to more general statements about a lawful order that those specific creatures must obey, and ends up with an even more general account of the lawful ordering of a variety of creational spheres.

At least two things can be said in defense of what Kuyper and Bavinck are doing. One is that they are engaged in the very kind of intellectual activity that gives life to much good theological reflection, that is, they are going beyond the explicit statements of Scripture to explore larger patterns of coherence that can shed light on the patterns of biblically-based thought. The second is that there is a fit of sorts between the actual biblical passages they allude to and their more speculative claims. For example, Bavinck's reference is to biblical instances that do in fact focus on the ways in which God shapes and governs the creation, using those references to talk about even more general ways in which God structures and orders created life. Much the same can be said for the way Kuyper moves from actual biblical examples of the separation of powers to more general claims about God's desire to draw clear lines of

²⁰ Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," unpublished translation by George Kamp and James Bratt.

separation among the spheres of society. In one sense, the leap is significant, but Kuyper is, as it were, asking us to consider the possibility that these particular examples illustrate a more general divine interest in the separation of powers, so that these separations are built into the very fabric of creation itself.

Needless to say, Kuyper is also moving much beyond the actual biblical data in setting forth his views about the ways in which the cultural spheres as such are somehow "contained" within the original creation. His even-if-the-fall-had-not-occurred-type hypotheses will strike some as highly speculative, and in an important sense they are. For those of us, though, who find biblically based imaginative proposals to be useful theological exercises, this is not necessarily a bad thing. There is a helpful parallel to be drawn here to the ways in which some historians use counterfactual claims to explore what recently has been labelled "virtual history." They ask, for example, what if Lee had won the Battle at Gettysburg or what if Charles I had refused to negotiate with the Scottish Covenanters in 1639.²¹ As J. M. Roberts has argued, in spite of the objections of skeptics, "the fiction that things could have been otherwise often seems in some sense to illuminate what actually happened." While contrary-to-fact conditionals can obviously "be clumsily or implausibly made," they can also "do positive good in the hands of good teachers."²²

Kuyper seems to be a reliable teacher in this regard. In his speculations about creation, he uses the counterfactual as a means of conceptual clarification. When he argues, for example, that politics were a part of the original creation, he means to be isolating those dimensions of political life that are not merely contingent on human perversity. This allows him to point to the need for the regulation of group activities even when it is not necessary to reinforce such regulative activity with coercive threats. To offer an effective rebuttal to this line of argument, it is not sufficient simply to reject his use of the counterfactual as such; rather, it is necessary to show that there is something conceptually implausible about what his use of the counterfactual is meant to illustrate, namely, the idea of a prelapsarian political order.

It is also important to highlight Kuyper's emphasis on the fact of cultural diversity if we are to be clear about why his thought does not match up exactly with those contemporary thinkers who are primarily concerned about the ways in which the state in particular tends to overextend its authority. As we have seen, the case for mediating structures is often put in terms of the need to

²¹ See J. M. Roberts, "Putting the What if? in History," *Times Literary Supplement* 4922 (August 1, 1997), 6.

²² *Ibid.*

avoid an inflated state, on the one hand, and an inflated individual, on the other. In order to guard against the twin dangers of statism and individualism, the argument goes, we need these strong non-political communal entities.

While Kuyper would be sympathetic to these concerns, he also warned against the dangers of inflating any one of these mediating structures, political or otherwise. He was especially vocal in this regard about the dangers of an overextended church. For Kuyper, the mandate given to the institutional church—local congregations and the broader ecclesial assemblies—had to do primarily with such activities as worship, catechesis, and evangelism. Churches were not to take on functions that were appropriate to other spheres. Here is how one of his American disciples, Princeton Seminary theologian Geerhardus Vos, expressed this Kuyperian point:

There is a sphere of science, a sphere of art, a sphere of family life and of the state, a sphere of commerce and industry. Whenever one of these spheres comes under the controlling influence of the principle of divine supremacy and glory, and this outwardly reveals itself, there we can truly say that the kingdom of God has become manifest . . . [Jesus'] doctrine of the kingdom was founded on such a profound and broad conviction of the absolute supremacy of God in all things, that he could not but look upon every normal and legitimate province of human life as intended to form part of God's kingdom . . . [But] it was not his intention that this result should be reached by making human life in all its spheres subject to the visible church . . . [W]hat is true of the relation between church and state, may also be applied to the relation between the visible church and the various other branches into which the organic life of humanity divides itself.²³

The concern that Vos expresses here about an overextended church loomed large in Kuyper's thought. Much of his practical activity as a public figure concentrated on opposing two very basic patterns of cultural hegemony: statism, which tries to invest political government with the right to direct all of cultural life to its own purposes; and the kind of ecclesiasticism that, in his mind, was typified by much of medieval life where the church went beyond its proper authority in imposing its influence on family life, art, business, and politics.

Kuyper's choice of the name for the university he founded, the *Vrije Universiteit*, is an important example in this regard. The *vrijheid* ("freedom") of his university was meant to be a freedom from both governmental and

²³ Geerhardus Vos, *The Kingdom and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 87–9; quoted in Spykman, "Sphere Sovereignty," 176–7.

ecclesial control. Each of these three entities—state, church, and university—belongs to a different sphere: The state as a political body exists to guarantee the distinctness of diverse sphere boundaries; the church is meant to provide a context for preaching, the sacraments, and the fostering of spiritual nurture; the university sponsors scientific activity, in the broad sense of science as the business of disciplined intellectual investigation. Each of these spheres has its own unique set of functions and norms, so that what goes into good government is not the same as what makes for good preaching or good scholarship. The Christian university, then, must avoid being controlled by government, but it must also stand apart from the direct influence of ecclesiastical authority. For Kuyper, this meant that the university should be governed by an association (*vereniging*) of persons whose sole purpose is to see to it that a specific kind of confessionally guided science is allowed to flourish.

In assessing the contemporary relevance of Kuyper's strong insistence on the need to respect the boundaries between various spheres, it is important, I think, to pay more attention to the general contours of his thought than to get caught up with his specific views about how the boundaries are to be drawn in practice. There is some irony in this assessment, since Kuyper's actual references to sphere sovereignty are more often than not to be found in contexts where he was insisting that a recognition of the diversity of spheres was the only way to avoid very practical confusions in societal life. Nonetheless, we do him no favors by focusing too much on his own practical applications for the purposes of evaluating his overall scheme. I offer one quick example as a case in point.

During the early 1890s, Kuyper got caught up in a rather intense debate over the appropriate sphere-setting for theological education. It is not necessary here to set out the historical specifics of this debate, which had to do with the merger negotiations between two Dutch Reformed denominations.²⁴ The question being debated posed a simple choice: Should the education of clergy take place in a church-controlled theological school or in a theology department housed in a "free" university? As might be expected, Kuyper argued passionately for the latter option. He was opposed with equal passion, however, by supporters of ecclesiastical sponsorship. In the final analysis, the two sides agreed to a compromise: The newly merged denomination would have two tracks for theological education, one in a church-controlled school and the other in a university setting.

What is important here is to see why Kuyper could not win this argument

²⁴ The details can be found in Hendrik Bouma, *Secession, Doleantie, and Union: 1834–1892*, trans. Theodore Plantinga (Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1995).

simply by appealing to sphere sovereignty. He could certainly insist that theology is a science in his broad sense of the term, and that it therefore deserves departmental embodiment in a Christian university. But that was not at issue in the debate. The important question for his opponents was whether the theology department of a free-standing university is the right sort of context for preparing people for parish ministries. In that connection, Kuyper's opponents could point out that the sphere-sovereignty scheme allows for education to take place in various spheres. Kuyper himself argued strenuously that, in contrast to the university, the education of children is primarily a parental responsibility—thus the strong emphasis in many Dutch Calvinist communities, both in the Netherlands and North America, on the need for “parent-controlled” Christian schools. Kuyper would also concede that there are patterns of educational activities that are important to other spheres: management training, education of artists by artists, and so on.

More specific to the debate about clergy education is the fact that the church also has a form of education in which it properly engages, namely, catechesis. Kuyper would certainly acknowledge this. What his opponents in the debate over theological education were arguing in effect was that the training of clergy is an important extension of the church's catechetical mandate. Since the argument, therefore, was formulated within the framework of sphere sovereignty, Kuyper had no decisive response to offer. Does this mean, then, that the sphere-sovereignty idea is not very helpful in deciding practical disputes like this one? Maybe not in deciding them, but it certainly provides much help by way of informing the debate. It is important, for example, to be clear about the ways in which education occurs in some contexts as a means of supporting a larger sphere mandate (as in management training), in contrast to the way in which education should be pursued in that “scientific” sphere where disciplined intellectual inquiry is itself the primary purpose of that area of human interaction.

V. THE MERITS OF THE KUYPERIAN PROJECT

In evaluating the merits of Kuyper's sphere-sovereignty scheme for our present context, it is important to ask very bluntly: Why follow Kuyper in his deep concern for drawing clear boundary lines among cultural spheres? Is it really all that good a thing to want to keep everything in its place in this manner? An answer of sorts is suggested by the Scottish theologian James Hutton MacKay, in a series of lectures on Dutch religious thought that he

delivered in Glasgow in 1911. Having recently completed a pastoral tour of duty in the Netherlands, MacKay delivered a series of lectures on nineteenth-century Dutch religious thought in which he used Kuyper as an example of what he saw as a typical Dutch fascination with the setting of boundaries. The Dutch mind, said MacKay, is fond of making distinctions:

"We are a people of dykes and dams," a Dutch writer said recently, "both as to our land and our mental life." And Dr. Kuyper's often-quoted saying about the danger of "blurring the boundary lines" is characteristically Dutch . . . [And] much, I believe, can be learned from a people who have a remarkable gift of making distinctions, wrought into their nature, possibly, by many centuries of unrelaxing toil in making and holding that distinction between land and sea, which to them is a matter of life and death.²⁵

MacKay is suggesting here that even if Kuyper's habits of mind in this regard actually reflect a more general pattern in the Dutch way of viewing things—one that might require, say, a "geo-intellectual" explanation²⁶—it is still possible that "much . . . can be learned" by paying attention to this deep interest in boundary setting.

Of course, the willingness to learn from Kuyper requires certain dispositions, as I have alluded to above. One is the disposition to see culture as woven into the original creation. While legitimate criticisms can be lodged against the way in which H. Richard Niebuhr sorts out the various "Christ and Culture" options in his classic book on that topic, he is right to point to the fact that Christians can all read the same Bible and yet come away with rather different assessments of what God's basic intentions are with respect to the various manifestations of human cultural activity. Niebuhr speaks well for those of us who subscribe to the "transformationalist" option when he identifies that position with the conviction that while culture as we experience it under present conditions is corrupt, it is "corrupted order rather than order for corruption . . . it is evil as perversion, and not as badness of being."²⁷ Furthermore, if God had something much better in mind for the complex patterns of culture—familial, economic, recreational, ecclesial, political—than what we presently encounter, it is incumbent upon us to get as clear as we can about whatever boundaries God wants us to respect.

In saying this, I must emphasize again that it does not matter much whether

²⁵ James Hutton MacKay, *Religious Thought in Holland during the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), 10.

²⁶ I discuss this possibility in a more detail in my "Dutch Calvinist Philosophical Influences in North America," *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (1989), 93-4.

²⁷ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 194.

Kuyper himself got all of the spheres exactly right. Indeed, I am not even convinced that we ought to hold on too tightly to the idea of spheres as such. As I have argued elsewhere, Kuyper's scheme, and Herman Dooyeweerd's rather elaborate refinement of it, basically offers us a kind of hermeneutic for modal discernment for our attempts to understand the complexities of cultural life.²⁸ Dooyeweerd helped to improve the Kuyperian case by substituting the language of "modes" for Kuyper's "sphere" talk. When we put too much of an emphasis on "spheres" we are tempted to view the creation as containing spaces or "slots" that need to be filled with various kinds of institutions and associations. A more modal conception, on the other hand, allows us to look for aspects and patterns that may in fact be configured in a number of possible combinations.

An example will help to clarify my meaning here. If we apply Kuyper's views very strictly, say, to the phenomenon of the "family business"—for example, a dry-cleaning establishment that is owned and operated by the members of a single family—such a social entity must be viewed with suspicion: Families are families, and businesses are businesses, and it is not good to mix the two spheres. I see no need to follow him consistently on such a matter. Where the Kuyperian scheme is still helpful, and very much so, I want to argue, is in "reading" the family-business phenomenon. Such an entity is indeed a combination of at least two different modes of cultural association: family and business. While the two modes may be combined, they should not be confused. It is good for participants in a family business to be very clear about the differences between familial and business relations.

Another disposition that is required is one that looks kindly on the idea of created diversity. Roger Henderson has rightly described the Kuyperian movement as having a strong fascination with "the radical diversity of creation."²⁹ Kuyper's God has a distinct bias in favor of diversity in the creation. As we have seen, it is precisely the emphasis in Genesis on the proliferation of "kinds" in the animal and vegetative realms that Kuyper builds upon in making his case for a divinely ordained diversity of spheres of cultural activity. To accept Kuyper's sphere sovereignty scheme, then, is to possess a rather complex framework for discerning boundary lines and making distinctions.

²⁸ See my "On Creation's 'Several Parts': Modal Diversity in Dooyeweerd's Social Thought," in *Christian Philosophy at the Close of the Twentieth Century: Assessment and Perspective*, eds. Sander Griffioen and Bert M. Balk (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 1995), 180–2.

²⁹ R. D. Henderson, "Illuminating Law: The Construction of Herman Dooyeweerd's Philosophy, 1918–1928" (Ph.D. diss., Vrije Universiteit, 1994), 128.

The need for maintaining clear boundaries is not obvious to everyone these days, and very often the resistance to boundary maintenance is an expression of a dissatisfaction with the fact of cultural diversity. One does not have to shop very far in the marketplace of contemporary ideas to find people who celebrate the blurring of boundaries and the breaking down of barriers that have long separated various spheres of interaction and inquiry. An obvious example is found in popular New Age teachings, which herald the appearance of an "emergent culture" where new syntheses are replacing older polarities between magic and science, East and West, nature and technology, women and men, folk teachings and scholarship, "primitive" and "advanced."³⁰ An interest in boundary-blurring between spheres can also be seen in a more mainstream, including mainstream-Christian, fondness for borrowing the motifs and concepts of one sphere for use in another, as in the church as "family" and as management "teams."

How this contemporary blurring of boundaries is to be evaluated from Kuyper's perspective is a large and important topic. Three observations will have to suffice here. The first is that it is worth thinking about the ways in which both Kuyper's sphere-sovereignty scheme and more recent celebrations of mergings and syntheses are expressions of a shared concern about the increasing threat of fragmentation in the patterns of human interaction. Some defenders of the starker versions of "postmodern" thought are willing, of course, to embrace the fragmentation, even to the point of cultivating what Iban Hassan describes as "an epistemological obsession with fragments" as a necessary means of avoiding "the tyranny of wholes."³¹ For those who are not attracted to this option, however, the search for new connections between the various spheres is an important project.

The desire to find inter-sphere connections is not a bad thing from a Kuyperian perspective. Indeed, some Kuyperians have suggested that it is necessary to emphasize a kind of "sphere universality" to balance off the possible fragmenting tendencies of the sphere-sovereignty idea.³² In the final analysis, however, Kuyper was not as interested in looking for the connecting principles within the creation as he was in emphasizing the fact that the

³⁰ This perspective is set forth in detail in Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s* (Los Angeles: T.P. Tarcher, 1980). This is a book often described as "the bible of the New Age Movement."

³¹ Quoted by Richard J. Bernstein, *The New Constellation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 199.

³² See Spykman, "Sphere Sovereignty," 168; and L. Kalsbeek, *Contours of a Christian Philosophy: An Introduction to Herman Dooyeweerd's Thought* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing, 1975), esp. chapter 13.

spheres ultimately are coordinated and linked by virtue of their mutual relationship to the transcendent will of the Creator.

Second, while Kuyper and his followers are quite willing to allow for trans-spherical commonalities and applications, they also find it necessary to warn against the very real dangers of sphere confusion. For Kuyper, the most basic confusion of all is the failure to keep clear about the boundary that separates the infinite being of the Creator from the finite creation. The title of an essay that he published in English in 1893 is instructive in this regard: "Pantheism's Destruction of Boundaries."³³ Original sin stems from this fundamental confusion: "and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). Kuyper's followers, especially those who developed his views in more systematic-philosophical terms, have expended much energy sorting out, and warning against, the various "reductionisms" that result from forming idolatrous attachments to this or that aspect of created reality. We do not need to put the case in such harsh terms, however. We can simply employ the sphere-sovereignty scheme to point to the dangers that lurk wherever people borrow too heavily from one sphere in spelling out the proper patterns of interaction in another sphere.

Take the application of familial concepts to the church. In his illuminating study of the rise of Methodism in America, Gregory Schneider shows how the nineteenth-century Methodists increasingly "domesticated" their understanding of the life and calling of the Christian community, focusing on "the image of home: the secluded and affectionate domestic circle constrained by the self-effacing love of the mother." The Methodist church "housed the family of God. The outlooks and sentiments they learned as members of the spiritual family disposed them to evolve a vision of domesticity and increasingly to identify their literal families and home circles with the idea of the spiritual family."³⁴ As the Methodist movement grew, however, many of its functions increasingly required the skills associated with managerial expertise. It was difficult, argues Schneider, for Methodists to integrate these functions into their theological understanding of the church, because they were operating with a bifurcated view of ecclesial life: "domestic piety and bureaucratic enterprise" seemed irreconcilable.³⁵

From a sphere sovereignty perspective, it is important to emphasize the fact that churches are neither families nor businesses, even though there may be

³³ Abraham Kuyper, "Pantheism's Destruction of Boundaries," *The Methodist Review* 53 (1893): 520-35, 762-78.

³⁴ A. Gregory Schneider, *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 196.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 205-7.

important links between churchly functions and things that happen in these other spheres. If the unique calling of the church is to promote the proper patterns of the worship and service of the God of the Bible, then both the more intimate dimensions of churchly fellowship and the managerial functions of the churchly structures are to be integrated with a view to fulfilling that larger mandate. When a clear focus on the unique patterns of ecclesial reality is not maintained, there is a constant danger that the church will borrow too heavily from other spheres for its understanding of its life and mission, thereby suffering from the distortions that these borrowings will inevitably affect.

Third, while there are good reasons within the Kuyperian framework for insisting that boundary lines should be carefully monitored, it is nonetheless necessary to avoid drawing too many boundaries. Not all diversity ought to be viewed as a good thing. The ways in which the Kuyperian scheme was used in the development of South African apartheid ideology raises necessary warning signals in this regard. Building on Kuyper's ideas, some influential Afrikaner thinkers extended the notion of separate cultural spheres to the need for separate ethnic cultures.³⁶ It is not difficult to show how this extension was not entailed by Kuyper's actual formulations of the sphere-sovereignty idea, given the ways in which Kuyper himself was able to move quite freely among different contexts of boundary drawings—from the Creator-creature boundary to the boundaries between animal “kinds” to the boundaries that separate cultural spheres—careful attention must indeed be given to the proper and improper patterns of boundary setting.

A final disposition is rooted in an optimism about our ability to discern the proper contours of created culture. Many Kuyperians express their optimism on this point in bold and sweeping terms. Here, for example, is Gordon Spykman on the subject:

The writings of the Old and New Testaments are the “spectacles” through which we seek to discern the meaning of our lives within God's creation. As our window on God's world, the Bible calls us to bow obediently to the full authority of God's Word for all of life. It leads us to recognize the normativity of God's revelation in creation, the creation ordinances by which God from the beginning structured the life of His creation. For creation is a cosmos (a richly diversified, yet coherently unified whole), not a chaos. Though the structures of creation have fallen under sin, God still

³⁶ The story of how Kuyper's views were used in this manner is told in detail by T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), 153–74, 215–33.

upholds them by His Word and redeems them in Jesus Christ. Scripture, serving as a pair of glasses, opens our eyes to the norms of these creation-redemption ordinances as they hold continuously for the full range of our societal life.³⁷

For those of us in the Kuyperian tradition, the terminology that Spykman employs here comes rather easily. Certainly, we should not too quickly abandon these phrases, since they serve as necessary reminders of the robustness of the vision that has shaped our ways of thinking about culture. We ought to realize, though, that this is not the way to make our case to the larger community, even to the larger Christian community. Our contemporary context requires a more modest and tentative presentation. As I see it, here is how such a presentation should go:

First, we should work with the realization that the Kuyperian scheme is not a mere summary of what the Bible explicitly “teaches.” Spykman’s formulations make that clear with his references, borrowed from Calvin’s *Institutes*, to the Bible as “spectacles” through which we look at created reality. We must go a step further, however, and admit that it is not always easy to see, or even to know enough to look for, creation’s “normativity” simply by studying the Bible and then turning to the observation of our lived-in world. The fact that some of us have learned to probe created reality for “ordinances” has much to do with a company of gifted instructors—Calvin, Kuyper, Bavinck, Dooyeweerd, and others—who taught us to pay attention to specific passages of Scripture, and to use the themes and motifs and hints that we find there to organize our understanding of the larger picture that we see being sketched out in the Word.

In explaining this process to others, we need to be clear about the fact that we have been captivated by a very imaginative way of charting out God’s designs in the revealed drama of creation, fall, redemption, and eschaton. When we encounter disagreement and dissent, as we surely will, we cannot fall back on pronouncements. Rather, we must explain as best we can why it is that we are deeply convinced that all of this is, while surely a speculative exercise, the product of sanctified imaginations.

In a very important sense, the merits of the Kuyperian scheme will be seen most clearly in the ways in which it sensitizes us to important questions that arise when we wrestle with the very real quandaries and challenges of our complex lives. Defenders of the sphere-sovereignty perspective need to engage in the kind of critical probing that Jean Bethke Elshtain exemplifies in

³⁷ Spykman, “Sphere Sovereignty,” 164.

discussing an actual case where familial imagery is applied to an area that is not literally "family." Pointing to Mario Cuomo's reference, in his address before the 1984 Democratic National Convention, to the United States as a family, she cautions that while the motive at work in this sort of comment can be a laudable one, we should not overlook the dangers of this way of characterizing political life:

Let's grant the decent intent behind the turn to familial metaphors. But to call a modern nation-state a family, in the interest of connecting us to one another, should be faulted because it too easily transforms citizens into Big Children. Government, in this scenario, becomes a benevolent, sometimes chiding caretaker and protector.³⁸

Elshtain is making a simple but important observation here: as helpful as it might be in some respects to liken our roles as citizens to familial relations, there are very significant ways in which nation-states are not families; and to confuse the two can be very dangerous. This is highly instructive for the kind of probing that Kuyperians must regularly pursue. When people apply the concepts of one mode of cultural life to another one, what is going on? What gives these references the feel of plausibility? What are the dangers that lurk beneath the surface? To ask these questions is to exemplify the habits of thought that James Hutton MacKay, in his 1911 Glasgow speech, singled out as a strength in Kuyper's thought. There is much to be learned, he said, from people who possess the gift of making distinctions. Kuyper has much to teach us about how to utilize this gift in sorting out the complexities of our social existence.

We do not do justice to Kuyper, of course, if we commend his perspective only for its pragmatic value in dealing with critical social challenges. He did, after all, insist that his own practical proposals were shaped by "principal" convictions, by a "world and life view" that was grounded in biblical teaching. This bigger picture, so important to Kuyper, has not lost its power, even in the very different societal context in which many of us continue to think about what we have learned from him. To find ways of showing, not only that the Kuyperian hermeneutic for modal discernment can help us ask good practical questions, but also how its pragmatic value is integrally connected to a larger vision of God's creating and redeeming purposes—this is, for some of us, a crucial challenge in our contemporary surroundings, one that also calls for the gift of discernment in large measure.

³⁸ Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Mario Cuomo Isn't Your Daddy," *New Oxford Review* (December 1996), 26.

The Protection of God's Darkness

by JANET L. WEATHERS

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Text: Psalm 57

*Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,
for in thee my soul takes refuge;
In the shadow of thy wings I will take refuge;
till the storms of destruction pass by. (Ps. 57:1)*

IN DETROIT, MICHIGAN, in the 1950s, a young mother took her child, Ben Carson, to church where he heard a pastor talk about a missionary doctor who had helped many people. At one point, the doctor and his wife were being chased by bandits. They raced away, but then came to the edge of a cliff. The only thing that saved them was a cleft in the rock where they were able to hide. The bandits caught up with them but couldn't find them anywhere. The pastor told the congregation that Jesus can be the cleft in the rock where we can hide.

Young Ben Carson was only eight-years-old when he heard the sermon, but it struck him deeply. That day he asked Christ to come into his heart, and he asked to be baptized. When he left church that day, he said something else to his mother: "Mom, I want to be a doctor. I want to help people, too."

His mother stopped walking, turned to her young son, put her hands on his shoulders and said, "Ben listen to me. If you ask the Lord, and you have faith, he will do it."

This encouragement did not seem very wise. Ben was not a strong student. When he was in the fifth grade, he flunked every subject. How could he ever think of college, let alone medical school? But his mother had great faith that her son was bright, despite his grades. And she wasn't willing to give up on him.

I cry to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me. (Ps. 57:2)

Ben's mother encouraged him to pray, and that's what Ben did. He prayed to God to help him to be a doctor so he could help people. When he was in the fifth grade, a compulsory eye exam led a doctor to discover that Ben had serious eye problems. He couldn't see the chalkboard. Once they gave the child glasses and he began to see those strange markings on the chalkboard,

things began making a lot more sense to him. His F's became D's. Through his mother's persistence in working with multiplication tables and insisting that he read extra books every week, Ben's academic skills got stronger and stronger. By seventh grade, he won the award for highest academic achievement in his class. In the eighth grade he repeated with the same excellence.

I lie in the midst of lions that greedily devour human prey.

Their teeth are spears and arrows, their tongues sharp swords. (Ps. 57:4)

Not everyone was happy about Ben's success. Ben was the only black child in his eighth-grade class. When he won the academic achievement award, the teacher who gave him the prize took the opportunity in a public ceremony to castigate all the white students for not trying harder, so that one of them might have won.

Ben was deeply embarrassed and upset by the implications of the teacher's words. He had been through the terror of being physically threatened by a white gang who caught him alone one day down by the train tracks, beat him, and threatened to kill him if he continued to go to a white school where he wasn't welcome. Later a group of his classmates' fathers threatened to harm him if he didn't drop out of the youth football league. Ben dropped the team and he never told his mother either of these stories.

Ben's teenage years became conflicted; anger raged in his gentle soul. When Ben was fourteen-years-old, a friend changed the transistor radio to another station complaining about Ben's choice in music. Ben's anger flared out of control, and he thrust the camping knife he kept in his back pocket into his friend's belly. It was only the thick metal belt buckle that saved his friend's life by breaking the steel of that blade.

*Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,
for in thee my soul takes refuge.*

*In the shadow of thy wings I will take refuge,
till the storms of destruction pass by. (Ps. 57:1)*

Ben ran home and locked himself in the bathroom with the Bible. This was not the first violent incident in which he had been involved. He loved God and still believed he was called to be a doctor. But the destructive storms of anger and hatred that swirled around him in society were now swirling out of control in his own mind and heart. His future seemed bleak, if not hopeless. Ben prayed and wept for hours. He knew if there was any chance of him becoming a doctor, he needed God to help him control his anger.

As he was reading the Bible, he was particularly moved by Proverbs 16:32: "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit

than he who takes a city." As he kept reading the words, he felt that they condemned him but also gave him hope. He continued to read the Bible and slowly a deep calm began to descend on him. His hands finally quit shaking, and his tears stopped.

During those long hours of anguished prayer, Ben knew that God was changing his heart. At the time of this incident, Ben had had a long history of violent outbursts as a result of pathological anger. But he walked out of that bathroom a changed man. Never again in his life has he had trouble controlling his temper, even when he was under tremendous stress and facing harsh ridicule. He began to realize the power people had over him if they could insult him and get him to lose control. Through God's movement in his heart, Ben took that power back.

My heart is steadfast, O Lord, my heart is steadfast! (Ps. 57:7a)

Ben sought the dark safety of God's protective wing. He cried to God for help and help was forthcoming. The deep calling to become a physician was to become a reality. Ben received a full scholarship to Yale and completed medical school at the University of Michigan. After several years of residency in surgery and neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins and at a hospital in Australia, he returned as a surgeon on staff at Johns Hopkins Medical Center. And when he was only thirty-three-years-old, he was made chief of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins.

When doctor after doctor told a mother of Siamese twins joined at the head that she must choose one son to live and one to die, she refused to accept that choice. She kept going from one doctor to another seeking help. Finally someone told her that the only person who might be able to help her was Ben Carson, and she sent the medical records to him. He studied the case and became convinced that it would be possible to save both children. Through a number of extraordinary events, he gathered and directed a team of seventy physicians, and after a twenty-two hour surgery, both children were saved.

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast!

I will sing and make melody!

I will give thanks to thee, O Lord, among the peoples;

I will sing praises to thee among the nations. (Ps. 57:7, 9)

Ben did give thanks to God among the peoples, and he continues to do so. He acknowledges God's role in helping him to withstand all the forces in our society that tried to keep him from expressing his gift. He begins every surgery with prayer and prays throughout each surgery. He is sometimes guided to cut the brain of a dying person in a place he cannot even see, yet he

knows that the dying person has no other chance. Sometimes, those strong intuitions save the life of a person who would not have had a chance otherwise. He believes it is through God's guidance that these miracles occur.

Ben had every reason to be consumed by hate. All the sociological and psychological data pointed to him as a child who would never make it. But Ben had been given a great gift—a strong mother who, despite the challenges in her own life, believed deeply in her son, and she believed in God.

She took her child to church where he could hear stories of how God works in human lives. Their faith created a place of dark safety into which they could retreat as they sought to shore up strength and wisdom to return to the glaring light of hatred and prejudice that permeated the society.

In the darkness, we are far more alike than different, people with dreams and hopes, fears and needs. In the darkness, we are far more alike than different—children of a God who promises to be steadfast in faithfulness and love. In the light, it becomes dangerous. Human judgments and prejudices begin to grow and solidify into hatreds that are then passed down through generations and infect us, even as children. As Maya Angelou writes, "The plague of racism is insidious, entering into our minds as smoothly and quietly and invisibly as floating airborne microbes enter into our bodies to find lifelong purchase in our bloodstreams." Angelou's encouragement is for us to recognize that human tongues can indeed be swords and instruments of brutality and violence. The psalmist holds the same view. In many psalms, the offensive word is pointed to as the most dangerous weapon in human conflict.

As children, many of us were taught a different lesson. Remember the old rhyme, "sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." Our parents may have passed that on to us in the hope that it might protect us from the mean and hurtful things children can say. But in truth, we know that that's not the case. Words injure, and they stir up hatreds that destroy lives.

In 1991, in Lincoln, Nebraska, the grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, Larry Trapp, began sending threatening messages to a rabbi, an African-American woman who was publicly known because of her political activism, and an Asian professor at the University of Nebraska. The notes made it clear that they were not welcome in Lincoln.

The grand dragon let them know he knew where each person lived. He threatened them and their families if they remained in Lincoln. The notes were turned over to the police, and the police, aware of Klan activities in that part of the country, told the people that they should take the threats seriously and be cautious about their activities and those of their children.

How does one live with such hatred? How does one respond?

The rabbi, Michael Weissner, refused to be intimidated. He took a step for which the grand dragon was unprepared. The rabbi began calling the grand dragon's home telephone number. He would have to listen to ten minutes of racist, anti-Semitic venom before he got to the beep, but then he would leave his message. He left several messages for the man, including one that said, "Be very careful about the hatred you spread. Some day you are going to have to face God, and it's not going to be easy." He called again and again.

One day he left a message saying, "I know who you are, and I know that you're disabled. Don't you realize that the Nazis to whom you pledge allegiance put the disabled on their list of persons who didn't have the right to live?"

The grand dragon later admitted that he knew that that was true. Finally, one day the rabbi called and the man actually answered the phone. They began to talk. During that conversation, Trapp said, "Quit harassing me. I hate you. I don't want anything to do with you."

Weissner responded by saying, "I know that you're disabled. I'm wondering if you have a difficult time getting groceries and taking care of other things that I might be able to help you with."

There was a long silence. The grand dragon wasn't prepared for the rabbi's kindness. He said, "I don't need the help. It's taken care of, but thank you for making the offer."

The Rabbi didn't give up. He kept calling and kept talking. Finally, one night the grand dragon called Weissner back and said, "I'd like to get out of the Klan, but I don't know how to do it."

The rabbi asked if he'd eaten dinner, and when Trapp said no, Weissner and his wife packed up a meal and went to the man's home. They took the food in, and that night a strange friendship began forming.

Over time, through conversations with the rabbi, the grand dragon began to see how wrong the white supremacists' views were. He told the rabbi stories of how he had been taught hatred as a young child, of things that had happened to him that he had internalized. He told Weissner how he came to believe that his role in life was to create as much hatred in Lincoln, Nebraska, and that part of the United States, as he possibly could. But he now realized how wrong he was, and in a public meeting he denounced the Klan and asked the rabbi, the African-American woman, and the Asian professor if they could possibly forgive him. And they did. In news articles in 1993, Trapp exposed the goals and methods of the Klan. He said he fears that the Klan's current

plans involve not only spreading hatred but also increasingly violent acts of terrorism against Blacks and Jews and other groups.

When asked why he reached out to Trapp, Rabbi Weisser responded, "That's what God requires of me. I have to love this man even though I hate his destructive acts."

By acting on his convictions, Weisser transformed a committed enemy into a friend, and that friend, in turn, helped to expose the depth and breadth of the hatred that continues to be fueled by Klan activities in our country. Trapp also began to do anything he could to get other white supremacists to reject the Klan and the Klan's beliefs.

I lie in the midst of lions that greedily devour human prey.

Their teeth are spears and arrows, their tongues sharp swords.

They set a net for my steps; my soul was bowed down.

They dug a pit in my way, but they have fallen into it themselves. (Ps. 57:4, 6b)

The racism that continues to be fueled by groups such as the Ku Klux Klan was bred by the institution of slavery. No one in this room, no one alive in this country today, had anything to do with the decisions that led the founders of this country to build the country on the backs of human slaves. They dug a pit to capture African people, and not only did they fall into it themselves, but they pulled all the rest of us in with them. One cannot live in this society unaffected by the poison of racism. How many great souls who could have brought a breakthrough in science, who could have composed beautiful music, painted a beautiful picture, or preached a redeeming sermon have been lost, because in their case, hatred won and the children never had the chance to grow into the fullness of the gifts God had given them? There are wonderful examples when love seems to overcome hatred, but we all know that in many cases, lives are lost, despite faithful and heartfelt prayer.

It may take generations to eradicate racism in our society, but every effort we can make, in our own lives, and in our own institutions, can make a difference. And we can each do something. We can start right here in our own community and in our local congregations.

Racism creates wounds that require careful cleansing and fresh air if they are to heal. Covering them over with thick bandages and hoping that, if we don't look, they will heal by themselves, is a way to invite even more serious infection. Such cleansing is often painful. Honest confession usually is. But we may find, as Ben Carson did, that the biblical words that convict us also give us hope.

Many dynamics in our society serve to pit us against one another, but there is a deeper truth that we affirm every time we come to worship together. Jesus gave his life for all of us. And Jesus invites all of us to this table. As we receive communion this morning, I invite you to join me in looking honestly at the racism that resides within our own minds and hearts.

It requires ongoing effort to discover the insidious ways in which racism has seeped into our thinking. If we are serious about the effort, we are going to need one another's help. It is disconcerting, but nevertheless true, that my prejudices are sometimes more obvious to you than they are to me. We can see everyone else as they speak and live their lives. The one person we can never see in action is ourselves. Through a trusted relationship, it is possible for us to learn far more about ourselves than we can learn alone. It would take courage and trust, but perhaps we can build friendships within this community—friendships that cross the kinds of divisions that try to separate us—friendships that are strong enough to make such hard work possible. May we not be destroyed by the storms of destruction that seek to divide us against one another.

My friends, you are invited to seek the protection of God's darkness when the storms of destruction rage around you. Those storms may come from destructive forces outside of you, or those storms may come from destructive forces that swirl inside your own mind and heart. Regardless of the source of the storm, God's darkness is offered as a place of refuge for you. In the safety of that darkness, make your confession and seek God's healing. Be strengthened. Seek wisdom and the courage to go back into the light to do the work that God calls you to do.

May our hearts be steadfast! And may our eyes be open for signs of grace and for signs of healing in our lives, in our community, in our society, and in our world. And when we see those times when love wins, may we remember to come together to thank our God. Amen.

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Commitment to God's World: A Concise Critical Survey of Ecumenical Social Thought, by A. van der Bent. *Missiology* 25 (1997) 111-2.

BOOK REVIEWS

Stackhouse, Max L. *Covenant and Commitments: Faith, Family, and Economic Life*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997. Pp. 195. \$18.00.

Covenant and Commitments is part of the wide ranging project *Family, Religion, and Culture* conducted by Don S. Browning and others over the past few years. It not only contributes a crucial focus on economics and public policy, it also expresses in new ways Stackhouse's life-long concern to relate theology to public ethics. Thus, it is important not only for its timely contribution to current efforts to strengthen social institutions but also for its distinctive argument linking theology, ethics, sociology, and public policy. With its expansive framework and synthetic vision, this book should become a critical partner in these interdisciplinary discussions.

Stackhouse drives home the importance of these connections in his first chapter, which revolves around the heated debate over homosexuality. It would be unfortunate if readers, having discovered his firm opposition to the affirmation of homosexual relations, would stop reading, whether out of intense agreement or disagreement. Both would miss the significance of his underlying concerns, namely, that an adequate ethic of marriage and family should be part of a wider vision of social and institutional vitality, that it cannot simply be derived from an ethic of individual ends, and that it must engage both the demands of biology and those of political freedom. Indeed, an adequate religious basis for civil society requires a full theory of marriage and family if it is to resist the modern (and "postmodern") tendency to reduce everything to matters of the state and of the individual. Such a dualistic conception makes both liberalism and socialism misleading and destructive guides for the future.

Stackhouse's argument concerning homosexuality seeks to connect our given biological structures with a covenantal ethic. The strength of this synthetic effort also manifests some critical ambiguities. On the one hand, he wants to re-connect our biological character with a conception of human freedom gained through covenant. On the other hand, he resists the reduction of covenant, with its inherent volunteerism, to biological necessity. Thus, he is adamant about the affirmation of gender equality. However, instead of seeing homosexual relations as an expression of relational freedom and equality, he appeals to the structures given in creation. He does not see in this biblically-grounded connection merely a set of interpersonal values that both types of relationships might pursue, but normative social structures, namely,

male-female conjunction. Disagreements over the ethical status of same-sex relations are thus grounded in theological decisions about the relation between nature and grace, createdness and freedom.

The question is, why draw the line where Stackhouse draws it? Why make homosexuality the critical boundary between graceful freedom and physical structure? The theological answer seems to be that the covenantal vision that yields the best basis for civic freedom is also intrinsic to the structure of original creation. It is this covenantal paradigm that forms the social vision necessary for a truly civil and just society.

To make his point Stackhouse argues that the Bible understood marriage and family to be a covenantal relationship. However, while the Bible uses marriage as a metaphor to understand covenant, the Bible never speaks of marriage as a covenant, which is essentially a treaty form. Stackhouse would have to prove this connection with a fuller argument apart from relying on later Reformation and Puritan uses of covenant to talk about marriage.

Once he fixes on the Puritan vision as the hermeneutic for biblical covenant, however, Stackhouse, assisted by his research assistant Dierdre Hainsworth, guides us into the ways covenantal, marital, and family ethics imply a supportive, subsidiary role for government; a vigorous pro-active family policy for churches, corporations, and voluntary associations; and a heightened sensitivity to the centrality of parenthood. These emphases are directly linked to the welfare of a civil society through which ultimate norms are mediated to law and government. Informing this process ought to be a church that sees itself as a prophetic means for discerning ultimate norms, though it is not clear here how this is to proceed in a religiously pluralist society. Indeed, since Stackhouse places a covenantal vision at a point of absolute superiority over others, it is unfortunate that he names one of its rivals "Catholic," which could imply that denominational Catholics, with their traditionally sacramental views, cannot share in his discourse at the deepest level.

Stackhouse clearly does not intend to exclude anyone from this challenging debate. Indeed, this volume stakes out a crucial way to enter it, whether by enlarging our senses of sacramentality, motivating the ecological recovery of our wider nature, or clarifying how our sexually bonded relations participate in the stewardship of creation to which he calls us in this book.

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Carr, Anne, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, eds. *Religion, Feminism, and the Family*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996. Pp 398. \$33.00.

Anne Carr (Professor of Theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School) and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (Professor of Psychology and Philosophy at the Center for Christian Women in Leadership, Eastern College) have taken on a challenging project in this book. Part of a series conceived and directed by Don Browning of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, this text attempts to explore diverse and wide ranging perspectives on family life. This twelve book series was developed to explore theoretical groundings that might better inform debate about the family in the contemporary United States context. The series is comprehensive, examining economics, law, congregational life, religious roots, reproductive technology, and other topics as they impact the creation and maintenance of today's family.

The volume under discussion here explores feminist perspectives on the family from a variety of angles. The nineteen chapters range in topics from the family in the Hebrew Bible, in the life of the early church, in medieval times, and in other historical contexts to explorations of current issues under debate such as family and work lives, fatherhood in families, and families in various racial and ethnic contexts. Many of the authors have some association with the University of Chicago Divinity School.

The two introductory chapters set an important tone for the book as they attempt to present a fair representation of the diverse perspectives on the family, even within the feminist movement as they define it. This attempt to provide a balanced approach to feminism, religion, and the family has a number of strengths. It shows the range of opinion within a methodology that is often seen as monolithic. It appeals to, and is available to, a range of reader perspectives who might otherwise not be exposed to this body of scholarship. And, it works hard to let a variety of voices speak to these issues without pressure to conform to an ideology. There are also weaknesses to the approach. In an attempt to bridge diverse points of view in a polarized conversation, the editors and authors often fail to represent some of the more cutting edge or radical perspectives in feminist scholarship about family. There is also a tendency, best seen in the series Foreword, to falsely depict other feminist literature on family as (1) hostile to family life and (2) written only by women in order to set this text (which does have male contributors and which is supportive of a fairly traditional family structure—for example, there is no chapter on the gay family or on single mother families) up as unique in the field.

Apart from these limitations, the chapters in this book are consistently informative, thorough, and useful. They are well written and present important research on material that is foundationally relevant to today's family. Several chapters stand out as particularly engaging and informative. The two introductory chapters, one on religion and feminism by Anne Carr and Douglas Schuurman and the other on feminism and the family today by Mary Stewart van Leeuwen, are very thorough in presenting the important perspectives and debates in these arenas. Van Leeuwen's chapter is especially helpful in looking at key issues about the family that are important to feminist scholarship and the disagreements and agreements about those issues.

Four other chapters deserve special mention in my opinion. Tikva Frymer-Kensky's chapter on the family in the Hebrew Bible is an engaging and highly informative article. It is rich in description and scholarship, as are many of the articles in this volume. Sally Purvis' chapter on Christian feminist ethics and the family is a powerful constructive ethic, carefully developed, that places notions of today's family in the context of the larger community of God as the fundamental notion of family. It shifts the debates and frames of reference and accountability in significant ways. Bonnie Miller McLemore's article on the frequent tension in our need to both "love and work" is also very helpful. She provides a thorough and systematic-constructive project on the meaning of "having it all" in today's world. She is able to hold the ambiguities and tensions of this cliché while theologically reconstructing its meaning in ways that give both hope and direction for contemporary families. Finally, Christine Gudorf's chapter on parental spiritualities artistically deconstructs the notion of parenthood as self-sacrificial and reconstructs an ethic of parenting that is mutual and co-creative. In this process, she looks at parenting dynamics from generational, cultural/patriarchal, and theological lenses in compelling and engaging ways.

This book is a significant contribution to the conversations on family and religion. I look forward to using it in my pastoral care in families course.

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Witte, John, Jr. *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox. 1997. Pp. 315. \$24.00.

The main focus of this valuable study is revealed by the subtitle, with law being the primary concern. It vividly encapsulates the drift of the Western tradition—be it Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, or Anglican—where the

marriage liturgy, in contrast with the Eastern Churches, is primarily concerned with establishing a legal contract.

Witte begins by tracing the development of a Christian understanding of marriage from the New Testament traditions of the Gospels, Ephesians 5, and 1 Corinthians 7 to the reflection on the implications of these passages for a Christian church living in the Roman Empire. The discussion of John Chrysostom and Augustine is interesting, though Witte might have noted that the more positive view of marriage in Chrysostom is symptomatic of the difference in approach that characterizes East and West. Augustine is the formative figure for the West, establishing marriage as having natural, spiritual, and contractual dimensions. For Augustine, sexual intercourse verges on the sinful and is mitigated only by marriage. He developed the concept of the sacramental bond that can be established in a number of ways, but that can be terminated only by death. Witte shows how the decretal of Gratian, and the theology of Hugh of St. Victor, Aquinas, and Lombard built upon and reinforced Augustine. Confusion existed over the status of betrothal vows made in the future tense, and whether sexual intercourse after such vows established marriage, and whether it was the exchange of vows between the couple or the blessing of the priest (Eastern tradition) that rendered the union sacramental.

Witte then turns to the Lutheran tradition, where the sacramental idea is replaced by marriage as a social estate. Luther argued that the church's jurisdiction over marriage usurped the authority of the magistrate. Luther's two-kingdom theory placed marriage and the family in the natural order, and the ecclesiastical ceremony did not confer grace. Power shifted to the magistrate, the pastor, and the community, and although many aspects of medieval canon law were taken over, a transformation did take place. Divorce was introduced. The canonists' distinction between the betrothal in the future, vows in the present, and consummation was modified. Luther argued that the Bible makes no distinction between the present and future tense of vows, and many statutes in Lutheran territories made no distinction between betrothal and marriage; a public betrothal was reckoned to be marriage.

With Calvin, Witte shows that here the paradigm for marriage was the covenant. He notes that the Genevan reformer was trained first as a jurist, and then as a theologian, and this two-fold training is reflected in his reforms of marriage. In the first phase of his career, it is Calvin the jurist who steers change; in the second, it is Calvin the theologian. According to Witte, initially Calvin followed Luther's two kingdoms concept, but in the 1541 Ecclesiastical Ordinances he gave the church an important role in family life. Betrothal

was made an unconditional promise conducted in the fear of God and before two witnesses. Once the betrothal was established, a formal wedding had to follow within three to six weeks. For Calvin, marriage had three interlocking purposes: mutual love and support; mutual procreation and nurture of children; and mutual protection from sin. He regarded divorce as the worst possible abomination since it broke covenant with spouse, God, and society—though in many cases remarriage was allowed for the guilty as well as the innocent party.

Witte labels the Anglican approach “Marriage as Commonwealth,” and quotes from William Perkins: “Marriage was made and appointed by God himself to be the foundation and seminary of all sorts and kinds of life in the commonwealth and the Church.” In England, Witte argues, it symbolized the common good, with the husband over the wife, parents over children, church over family, and state over church. The writings of Becon, Bullinger, and Bucer provided fertile ground for a theology of marriage. Nevertheless, although Witte correctly notes that in England the canon law remained intact, creating a situation as non-negotiable as the Catholic Church, he has failed to note that in spite of all church rulings, clandestine and common law marriage continued (the latter often ignoring the prohibitions of canon law) right down to 1753. Witte pays special attention to the ideas of Milton and Locke that, though later to bear fruit, failed to alter the situation at the time.

In a final section, Witte sees the views of John Stuart Mill as having set the agenda that has transformed marriage into “a terminal sexual contract designed for the gratification of the individual parties.” The greater the repeal of state regulation of marriage for the sake of marital freedom and sexual privacy, however, the greater the threat to the freedom for women and children that had been established in the first phase of the Enlightenment transformation of marriage.

There are some minor inaccuracies in this work. But, provided that it is remembered that this is primarily a study of how religion and theology altered the legal status of marriage, this book has much to offer. Those looking for a sustained theological study will need to look elsewhere.

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Switzer, David K. *Coming Out as Parents: You and Your Homosexual Child*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996. Pp. 101. \$12.00.

When David Switzer’s book, *Parents of the Homosexual*, first appeared in 1980, it was a landmark work for many in the Christian faith. Here was a

scholar, teacher, pastor, and counselor talking about the struggles of parents and families to come to terms with the lesbian or gay identity of their children. As Switzer notes in the introduction to this 1996 edition, *Coming Out as Parents*, much has happened in the gay/lesbian/bisexual movement since the late 1970s. Switzer's commitment remains clear: He is eager to assist parents and other family members of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals as they address the feelings and questions they have in response to learning or suspecting that someone in their family is homosexual.

The book is to be welcomed among its intended audience of parents and families who are in the initial stages of responding to the disclosure, or suspicion, of a family member's lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity. Families who come from a traditional Christian perspective will find this book helpful and accessible. The disclosure of a daughter, son, sister, or brother often brings into the open beliefs and attitudes that may have, prior to the disclosure, rested beneath the surface. Loss, anger, confusion, and the temptation of parents to move toward shame and blame of themselves or others are feelings that Switzer appropriately identifies. The strength of Switzer's work is his ability to walk parents through the sometimes chaotic feelings they experience initially, thereby normalizing the coming-out process for families. The goal, for Switzer, is to encourage family members to work at their relationships with honesty, a commitment to each other, and maturity. Switzer walks a fine line between educating parents about normal feelings they may experience, allowing them to move toward a comfortable acceptance, yet not moving them too quickly into affirmation or advocacy. This is both the strength and weakness of the work. Building on his pastoral care skills, Switzer is best at putting parents at ease by granting them permission to question and struggle. He is less adept at encouraging family members to move beyond tolerance or affirmation toward advocacy and empowerment. In all honesty, I do not think Switzer intends for the latter to be part of his presentation. His concern is with ongoing family relationships and he brings those issues to the foreground. Yet, Switzer's focus on the importance of family, while strengthening family communication, does not encourage explicit, broader movements toward justice in family, church, and community. As a result, sexual orientation remains in the family closet rather than being placed among the critical social justice issues that confront the church and society.

Finally, the updated 1996 edition of the book does not do justice to recent literature in this field simply because it does not have the room to do so. While noting that there is a wealth of material related to issues of sexual

orientation and its development, the interaction of genetic and psychodynamic processes in sexual identity, and the presence of social and political lesbian/gay/bisexual movements, Switzer states that his project is limited in its focus. Again, this is not necessarily a weakness given the intent of his book; it is merely a reality given the wealth of studies currently available.

For the most part, I deeply appreciate Switzer's work. It is a helpful resource, particularly for parents who are in the initial stages of struggling with issues of orientation. I have offered it in my own counseling practice as a resource and it has been appreciated. However, we continue to need prophetic pastoral-clinical voices who can engage congregations and church communities in this dialogue at broader levels of discourse.

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Graham, Larry Kent. *Discovering Images of God: Narratives of Care Among Lesbians and Gays*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997. Pp. 205. \$20.00.

The thesis of this study is "that an examination of the concrete lives of lesbian women and gay men, especially in the context of a variety of care-giving situations, discloses the capacity of lesbian and gay persons for creative, deep, and loving communion with God, self, neighbor, and the natural order." The author intends to offer a pastoral care text that is not only faithful to and pastorally helpful in gay/lesbian experiences, but that also learns from their experiences of care. At the same time, Graham offers a way of doing theology (and pastoral/practical theology) and hopes to contribute to the difficult and frustrating dialogues concerning homosexuality that are occurring throughout contemporary ecclesial and ethical discourse. This review will consider each of these intents.

Graham offers a valuable pastoral care text that presents and reflects upon the narratives of a community whose "living human documents" are not always visible or known to caregivers. To my knowledge, nowhere else is there a series of narratives offered that focuses around the religious and care-receiving experiences of this community. The narratives of care are presented within the context of a common humanity and an observed rich uniqueness of relational capacities. While drawing his pastoral theology out of the narratives themselves, it will not surprise anyone who knows Graham's other work to find pastoral care characterized by "three interlocking features": welcome and hospitality; communal solidarity and full inclusion and recognition; and transformation of oppressive and conditional relationships

and structures. This is itself a transformed understanding of pastoral care that is particularly felicitous when related to the care needs and experiences of lesbians and gays.

It is especially pleasing that, for Graham, care includes welcoming rituals, shared participation in church planning and mission, and the expectation that all pastoral caregivers and receivers embody a concern for "relational justice." From a pastoral care perspective, then, the book is invaluable as a resource for theological education and church study committees who need the resource of these human stories but do not have that visible presence among them.

Graham is also presenting "a way of doing theology." Essentially what he does is to begin with experience; this is then used to dialogue with and reconstruct "doctrine," focusing upon the *Imago Dei*. His argument is that an examination of concrete care situations will offer insight into formulations of the Christian drama, the theological enterprise being dynamic instead of static and fully dialogical—or multivalent—instead of hierarchical, patriarchal, or elitist. Thus, Graham is not interpreting gay/lesbian experience out of tradition but is, rather, taking their experiences seriously in the formulation and restructuring of theology itself. This will please those who do theology in this way, but will not convert those of an alternative concept of what constitutes "right" theological method.

Graham's main focus is the reconstruction of understandings of the *Imago Dei* that move from being endowed or marked by a particularity of sexual orientation, gender, social class, and so forth, that bestow worth and access, to the "capacity to experience a quality of relationship that mirrors God's own relationality." Such a move presents a true theological and pastoral challenge to any notions that to be in the image of God you have to be just like I am (or we are). Graham's reflections here could be helpful to Christian heterosexuals struggling with this particular issue of inclusiveness, while also offering the unconditional welcome for which Christian gays and lesbians hunger. There is good study material here for an educational program on theology or homosexuality.

Graham places less emphasis on a reconstruction of the doctrine of sin or on theological studies of human sexuality itself, though there are a growing number of resources on these topics. My deep grounding in Reinhold Niebuhr leaves me dissatisfied with the absence of an analysis of the power dynamics operative in homosexual as well as heterosexual eroticism. Graham's method appears "thin" here, as love and justice ideals and dynamics are always deeply affected by a continuing series of power and empirical transactions between "nature" and "spirit."

But will the text contribute to the continuing and complex dialogue about homosexuality? Probably not—at least in those places where conversation has become stuck and convictions refuse compromise. Graham can be read as affirming multiple relationships and a special gift of celebrating eros, both of which lie within his narratives. This is not helpful to a dialogue already bogged down in stereotypes and even the romanticism that can attend a morality of “relational justice.”

I personally long for the day—already arrived at in ecumenical discourse with all communities except this one—where all sexual persons (!) work together in full partnership and equal regard on the other issues that affect all human beings. In this area, perhaps the most important are the responsible celebrations and embodiment of eros; the responsible care and formation of children; and the continual calling together of ecclesial communities that risk the transformations that the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures both promise and expect.

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Streete, Gail Corrington. *The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997. Pp. 219. \$19.00.

Gail Corrington Streete, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Rhodes College, opens this recent contribution to the study of biblical women and sexuality with reference to two homemade road signs at the entrance of Interstate 40 in Memphis, Tennessee. She writes that the signs, boldly proclaiming “Adultery—Hell (Rev. 21:8)” and “Hell Hurts (Rev. 21:8),” sparked her reflection about the association of sexuality, immorality, and evil in the Bible and in the extracanonical literature of Early Judaism and Christianity. As “signs of the times,” they also point to the relevance of her study. In a culture continually struggling with issues of sexuality, Streete’s critical exploration of texts that inform our thinking about gender and our definitions of sanctioned (“normal”) and unsanctioned (“deviant”) sexual behavior is both welcome and helpful.

Streete focuses on the issue of adultery, arguing that throughout the canon there is a “surprising diachronic consistency” in how adulterous or sexually promiscuous women function as symbols of religious (e.g., apostasy, idolatry) and social chaos. Rather than dismissing these depictions of women as mere tools of patriarchy, however, Streete attends to how they reflect a perceived threat by women and women’s sexuality to male hegemony. The category of

“adultery,” she argues, serves broadly as a means to define and confine women who transgress boundaries. That is, women may be described as “harlots” or “adulterers” not only on the basis of sexual conduct, but because they act independently in a manner that rejects male control. The wisdom of biblical women, furthermore, is often associated with deception and seduction. Streete lifts up traditionally marginalized and demonized biblical women and explores how their “violations” may be read instead as liberating “strategies of resistance.”

Streete is methodical in working through the biblical and extracanonical literature. In chapter one, she considers stories of the “endangered ancestress” (Genesis) and biblical laws relating to sexual offenses (Exodus-Deuteronomy). She underscores how, in a culture shaped by the dynamics of patriliney (tracing descent through the male line), patrilocality (residence in the man’s home), and endogamy (marriage within a kinship group based on custom or law), women were considered the sexual property of men—their worth was based upon their reproductive potential and the status of the men to whom they belonged. Chapter two discusses women “on the boundaries” of society—particularly prostitutes and foreign women—in the Deuteronomistic History, Ezra-Nehemiah, Ruth, and the Song of Songs. In chapter three, Streete investigates sexuality as a guiding metaphor in the prophetic materials, including the portrayal of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel as a marital one (Hosea, Ezekiel, Jeremiah) and the depiction of foreign cities as promiscuous women seducing other nations to insult Yahweh (e.g., Second Isaiah, Nahum). Chapter four addresses the complex relationship between female sexuality and knowledge found in biblical (Proverbs) and apocryphal (Baruch, Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon) wisdom literature. In chapter five, Streete looks at various images of women and women’s sexuality in the New Testament. She focuses in chapter six on particular women in the Gospels and the “Great Whore” of Revelation. Finally, Streete examines how the connections between female power, wisdom, and sexuality are continued in some of the extracanonical materials of formative Judaism and early Christianity. She concludes with the image of Wisdom (Sophia) in Gnostic documents.

While the method of reading subversively (as a “trickster”) is not new, Streete is to be commended for engaging this range of material thoroughly and in an easily readable manner. She moves fluidly from one (counter-) reading to the next, interweaving critical analysis and drawing upon the contributions of feminist and womanist biblical interpreters. The result is an excellent overview of female sexuality in the Bible that encourages the reader to resist simplistic categorizations of women. There are, of course, issues for

further consideration. For example, while this is primarily a literary analysis, Streete occasionally draws connections between the narrative world and particular sociohistorical contexts. This can be problematic if one disagrees with her historical presuppositions. On the other hand, it opens the door to questions of how women's socioeconomic, political, and religious possibilities in those settings may have been threatening to the male-defined status quo. Such work could lend support to Streete's literary argument while broadening conceptions of what "strategies of resistance" were available to women. In sum, Streete's work is thought-provoking and merits consideration by all those interested in issues of gender and sexuality in the Bible.

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Brueggemann, Walter. *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997. Pp. 777. \$48.00.

At a time when many wring their hands before its numbing complexities, Walter Brueggemann writes about the Old Testament (OT) with the buoyant hope that postmodern Westerners at the turn of the millenium are ready to learn not only about its *contents*, but also about the particular *process* by which it came into being. This book is the magnum opus of one of the world's greatest OT theologians.

Pulsating at its core is Brueggemann's well-known conviction that the modernist theologies of Eichrodt and von Rad are not simply antiquated, but inadequate, largely because of the new, "so-called postmodern epistemological situation." This new situation of which he speaks is *postmodernist pluralism*. To modernist OT interpreters, postmodern pluralism is often perceived as a frighteningly fluid relativism, especially among those who choose to operate on the basis of unexamined Enlightenment presuppositions. But for Brueggemann, postmodernism offers a welcome reprieve from the hegemony of naive positivist historicism on the one hand and simplistic confessionalist traditionalism on the other. In fact, he thinks that postmodernist epistemology, proactively employed and contained within strict definitional parameters, opens up a wonderful opportunity for something new and exciting to happen in OT theology. In light of this multifaceted pluralism, Brueggemann wants to address "the *processes, procedures, and interactionist potential* of the community present to the text." The book's subtitle, *Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, signals the three factors he thinks are crucial to harnessing the dynamic potential of this new interpretive context.

Testimony. Brueggemann chooses this universally recognized courtroom metaphor to describe what he calls the OT's essential "character and mode of theological claim." What *Israel* has to say about its God (Yahweh) is the indisputable beginning point for theological reflection. "Testimony" must constantly be distinguished from all other, prepostmodernist definitional categories, especially those that rely on "history in any positivistic sense" or "classical claims of ontology."

Dispute. Brueggemann is on a crusade to convince OT scholars that their job is not to be professional harmonizers of the contradictory theologies lying side-by-side in the text's final form. Instead, the text needs to be examined more thoroughly and more competently for the inner dynamics of the disputes that bring these juxtapositions about in the first place. Instead of simply *noting* that the prophets and the priests are often in conflict, for example, Brueggemann demands that we ask more probing questions about the disputes themselves. Are the factors at work simply chronological, simply geographical, simply form-critical? What does the *Hebraic dispute-process itself* have to do with the OT's unique way of revealing theological truth? It is just as important, therefore, to examine the *theological process* as it is to reflect on *Israel's after-the-dust-has-settled theological conclusions*. To ignore either element is to render the OT irrelevant and inaccessible to postmoderns.

Advocacy. In the midst of the claims and counterclaims, there comes a crucial point in the dispute process when someone stands up and testifies *as an advocate for Yahweh*. Sometimes, this advocacy comes through the voice of a lone prophet (e.g., Micaiah ben Imlah in 1 Kings 22). Sometimes, it comes through the chastened voice of a newly repatriated Jewish colony (Ezra-Nehemiah). Sometimes, it comes through the exultant voice of an enfranchised community at worship (Psalm 150). Sometimes, it comes through the quiet voice of a disenfranchised foreigner (Tamar, Balaam, Ruth). Truth, in other words, is no static abstraction condescendingly lowered from the pious heights of Mt. Olympus. No, truth is a hard-won insight hammered out through a process of testimony-dispute-advocacy in the shadow of Mt. Zion. This insight into "truth" is perhaps the book's greatest contribution.

Completely unlike any other, this book is a quantum leap beyond anything else that has ever been written on OT theology. Von Rad's *Theologie* is scientific/historical; Brueggemann's is postmodern/pluralist. Terrien's theology is elegantly descriptive; Brueggemann's is passionately prescriptive. Vriezen's *Theologie* is classically summational; Brueggemann's is aggressively comprehensive. Doubtless it will be hailed as the first of a new breed for a new millenium, certainly among those who share Brueggemann's epistemological presuppositions. Whether it may turn out to be the best of this new breed,

however, is impossible to say until at least the following questions are permitted a preliminary hearing:

First, how can Brueggemann be so sure that the "assured results" of biblical scholarship are now so "unassured"? Does not this presumption depend on a "construal of reality" ultimately dependent upon the ideological makeup of the audience with whom one is obliged to interact? And are there not a number of scholarly audiences, especially in North America and Great Britain, for whom the hermeneutics of Ricoeur and the philosophy of Gadamer remain pointedly unpersuasive? Certainly *Wellhausen's* "scientific" approach to Israelite history is fundamentally flawed, but does this mean that it is now time to recast the entire discipline of OT historiography in pluralist categories?

Brueggemann needs to come out of the postmodernist closet here and listen a bit more carefully to what biblical archaeologists and historians are trying to say (yes, there are still a few around). What the Tell Dan inscription "proves" about the historicity of David's existence, for example, has nothing to do with the sort of "naive positivism" of which von Rad is guilty. Nor is the vast corpus of ancient Near Eastern inscriptional evidence something to be reduced to mere fodder in the endless debates between historical maximalists and historical minimalists. To quote another courtroom maxim: "Evidence is evidence."

It also will not do to simply dismiss other OT constituents as methodological dinosaurs. Certainly, we should all be on much better guard against objectivism, fideism, and all the other bastard stepchildren with which the less circumspect practitioners of historical criticism have unwittingly saddled us. Yet the OT's historiographical problems cannot be solved simply by throwing up our hands in abject surrender before the newer gods of hermeneutical relativism and historiographical nihilism. Some OT scholars are not quite ready to force legitimate historical criticism to the back of the postmodernist bus.

Second, I remain completely unconvinced that the theological voices said to be in conflict in the OT are as hopelessly opposed to one another as Brueggemann would have us believe. John Goldingay, among others, has addressed this subject. His study, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament*, is not the only other study of OT theological pluralism, but it is one of the more important because in it he offers not one, but several credible explanations for the OT's theological diversity, all of which deserve careful consideration. Apparently, however, Brueggemann disagrees; Goldin-

gay's name does not even appear in the index, a fact that seems odd for a book allegedly dedicated to pursuing truth through dialogue.

It would be inappropriate, however, to end this review on a negative note. Brueggemann has given us a great gift, a theology every bit as "magisterial" as those of his predecessors. For its depth of reflection, its breadth of learning, its pastoral compassion, its brilliant originality, its elegant readability, and its visionary power, Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament* deserves not simply to be read . . . *but to be disputed!*

Michael S. Moore

Fuller Theological Seminary Southwest

Jenni, Ernst, and Claus Westermann. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. 3 vols. Trans. Mark E. Biddle. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997. Pp. 1638. \$119.95.

The Old Testament, or so it seems, is always at a distinct disadvantage. It is as if Marcion's heresy has never died out but still manifests a strong heritage in contemporary Christian devotion, study, and practice. Perhaps this scenario is axiomatic in heresiology, but it is disturbing in any event, especially if one happens to like the Old Testament and if one considers it to comprise an integral part of the church's canon of Scripture.

The Old Testament's disadvantage is felt in many ways, not the least of which is that most preachers, more often than not, are inclined to preach the New Testament passage from the lectionary. They are not to be faulted too much: The New Testament just seems easier, more familiar, more grace-full, more . . . well, happy. The Old Testament is a dark tome, full of unfamiliar places, peoples, even deities—and, perhaps most disturbing of all, Yahweh is often seen as one of these unfamiliar.

This unfortunate situation has been complicated by the lack (in comparison to the New Testament) of complete, user-friendly, and helpful reference works on the Old Testament. Happily, this has begun to change and Hendrickson Publishers deserves our hearty thanks for making a great stride forward by releasing the *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Up to this point, the preacher or interested layperson who wanted information on specific Hebrew or Aramaic words was often frustrated. The standard lexicon of Brown, Driver, and Briggs (*BDB*) is now almost a hundred years old—hardly current with the latest developments in Old Testament research. Better lexica exist, but these are usually in other languages (primarily German), or are incomplete. Lexica, moreover, by virtue of their genre cannot

treat words in dictionary, word-study-like fashion. But the available "theological dictionaries" pose the same problem as the lexica: Kittel and Friedrich's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, although complete, naturally treats Old Testament words primarily as they bear on the New Testament. Botterweck and Ringgren's *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (TDOT) is more to the point, but at eight volumes is still incomplete in translation and quite costly. The much more economical and manageable *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (TWOT) has much to commend it, but its scope prevents extensive coverage and its format (and title) indicates that it isn't quite sure if it is a lexicon or a dictionary or both.

Enter the *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (TLOT). Originally appearing in two German volumes during the 1970s as *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (THAT), TLOT is the perfect remedy for the Old Testament word-study dilemma. Short enough to be complete, yet long enough to be of substance (329 articles), it is—best of all—in English thanks to Mark E. Biddle, who is becoming something of a master translator in Old Testament studies. This edition of TLOT has also been updated to make it even more useful to readers: Each Hebrew word is now keyed to Strong's concordance of the Bible, BDB, TDOT, TWOT, and the recent, five volume *New International Dictionary of the Old Testament and Exegesis* (NIDOTTE), not to mention the most up-to-date lexicon available: Koehler and Baumgartner's *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, which is nearly complete in English translation. These practical considerations, by the way, make TLOT usable even by those who do not know Hebrew. In fact, it is designed for "theologians and pastors with a minimal knowledge of Hebrew and OT studies."

But there is still more to recommend TLOT. The editors have tried, as much as possible, to surpass the limitations of the word-study approach, which has long been criticized by James Barr and others as naive in its understanding of meaning. TLOT, then, strives to keep a broad methodological approach, drawing on "recent" (but the original publication in the 1970s should be kept in mind) linguistic theory (especially semantic-field research), as well as the results of form and tradition criticism. The articles are well laid out, including information on a given word's root and derivation, statistical frequency, meaning(s), theological usage, and postbiblical usage. Finally, the third volume concludes with an appendix containing additional statistical information and, more importantly, extensive indices of Hebrew and Aramaic words, of English glosses, of modern authors, and of Scripture references (over 100 pages worth!).

If *TLOT* has a major drawback, it is probably its size and lack of comprehensiveness. This means that many important words go undiscussed. Still, the fact that related lexemes are often treated in the context of major word articles means that the word coverage is actually much greater than the 329 articles would at first suggest (e.g., the article on ^ʾlî "lion," the main Hebrew word for lion, includes discussions of the other Hebrew terms also used for lions: ^ʾlyēb, ^lābî, ^layîš, ^gôr, ^šaḥal, and ^kpîr) and it is easy to locate the word in question by using the indices. On the positive side, *TLOT* includes as "theologically relevant words" various parts of speech that are normally bypassed in works such as this (e.g., pronouns, adverbs, prepositions, interjections). Another critique is, of course, that the lexicon is over twenty years old; even so, the translator and publisher have, along the lines noted above, striven to increase the accuracy and contemporaneity of the work as much as possible.

At about \$120, *TLOT* is still a splurge, but it is certainly the best, most complete, and most economical option currently available on the market for all the reasons mentioned above. As such, it deserves to be in every ministerial library, and, if it is, it deserves to be used as an important resource in study and sermon preparation. It may even be that *TLOT* will help unlock some of the mystery and obscurity of the Old Testament. If so, the Old Testament may begin to get its due and begin to see its day in both pulpit and practice. Who says heresies live forever?

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Princeton Theological Seminary

Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996. Pp. 508. \$25.00.

This is an immense book—in length, in structure, and in heart. Even to outline its structure would take more words than are at my disposal in this review. The author moves from text to church application today by such a series of complex stages that he easily impresses upon the reader how herculean is any wrestling with the problem. How *do* we get from then to now?

The book begins with a study of representative New Testament authors, focusing on the relationship between the theological and ethical perspectives (since it is the *text* that is important, the historical Jesus is not decisive in the enquiry). Next, since the texts are so diverse, one needs overarching perspectives, derived from the texts, that can guide thinking about explicit moral

solutions. Hays decides upon three: community, cross, and new creation. He argues that these are "focal images" because they occur in all segments of the New Testament.

Still, we are not ready to begin searching for New Testament moral teaching for we have yet to look at how ethicists think when they inspect moral issues. Furthermore, it is helpful to flesh out the abstractions by looking at five specific thinkers who deal with ethical matters—Hays selects Reinhold Niebuhr, Karl Barth, John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (an interesting chapter, but perhaps not absolutely central to the enterprise). Even so, Hays is not done. He attempts to bring together all the theoretical and perspectival guidelines he thinks are crucial in dealing with specific texts and issues.

Only now (after 312 pages!) is he ready to embark on the actual task of moving from texts to contemporary application. To illustrate this process he studies five issues: 1) "Violence in Defense of Justice" (or pacifism); 2) "Divorce and Remarriage"; 3) "Homosexuality"; 4) "Anti-Judaism and Ethnic Conflict"; 5) "Abortion."

Several perspectives mark the character of this intense and passionate manifesto—for this is no intellectualistic approach. First, it is a *church* ethic. There is little apologetic. No quarter is given to the views of secular society. Hays's question is about what the church should do, not how the world should behave. His conclusions are fortified by claiming that the focal images—community, cross, new creation—all support those positions, and thus are embraced by the basic theological perspectives of the New Testament authors.

Second, it is a *New Testament* church ethic. That is, Hays remains stubbornly faithful to what he takes the New Testament to say, even, or perhaps especially, if the contemporary church follows another drummer. He argues, for example, that the church must come to a stand against violence because this is true to the vision of the New Testament. He knows he is speaking against the majority of church views, but he will not let go.

Third, this work does *not* fit either of the traditional "liberal" or "conservative" labels. In my judgment, this is one thing that makes the book both attractive and provocative. The author does not fall into the "liberal" pigeonhole, because he takes the New Testament as normative. He exhibits a hostility to accommodation to secular values. He thus takes what seem like conservative stances on issues such as the authority of Scripture, homosexuality, divorce, and abortion. Yet he presents a powerful argument for non-violence/pacifism and has provocative things to say about Christian responsi-

bility for economic resources, hardly the traditional fare of most conservative theologians.

This is not an easy book. It makes demands of time, concentration, and patience on the reader. It is, more important, appropriately unsettling. Most readers will find areas of disagreement—as I certainly did. Hays is too careful a thinker, however, to make his views easily dismissible and, as always, one learns the most from a careful statement of a view one opposes. In any case, don't expect Hays to let the reader off the hook, as if nothing really depended on a decision about an issue. While caring, he is also committed to his decisions. He makes it clear the reader should be too. Hence, this is an important book for serious searchers.

Robin Scroggs
Union Theological Seminary

Long, Thomas G. *Matthew*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997. Pp. 331. \$20.00.

Well-known homiletician Thomas Long contributes this volume on Matthew to the Westminster Bible Companion series, a series intended to help non-academic audiences appreciate the biblical texts and understand their significance for everyday life. Long is an excellent match for this task—each page bespeaks his gifts as a communicator and teacher. Though Long presupposes and imparts much historical scholarship, he does not foreground matters of language or ancient history; his emphasis always falls on illuminating examples drawn from contemporary incidents, allusions, and diction.

Long expounds the Gospel sequentially from genealogy to Great Commission, with one excursus on “Sin and Sickness” during Matthew’s healing and exorcism stories in chapters 8–9; he follows the NRSV text, which is reproduced in the text. Long’s ear for analogy is well-tuned, and the twentieth-century “as ifs” that he adduces to amplify Matthew’s narrative bring the biblical words vivid color: The debt-ridden slave of Matthew 18 is like “a lowly mail-room clerk [who] owed the CEO of IBM a ‘bazillion dollars,’” and the unwelcome guest at the wedding banquet is “bellying up to the punch bowl, stuffing his mouth with fig preserves, and wiping his hands on his T-shirt.”

Indeed, the principal difficulty with this companion to Matthew lies precisely in its strength: Because Long does not engage the scholarly interpretive controversies in Matthean interpretation, his readers may not recognize that he is not simply telling them the way it is with Matthew, but taking sides

on a number of vexatious interpretive cruxes. To those who sympathize with Long's preferences, this book will therefore be an ideal resource. Others, however, will hesitate not only because Long disagrees with their conclusions, but also because Long's winning style makes such disagreements seem so implausible. In this way, Long's gift for contemporization engenders the risk of stifling voices that dissent from his representation—which would be a shame, since Long's version of Matthew's Gospel deserves hearty discussion. Is it best, for example, to interpret Matthew's demands for "greater righteousness" even to the point of "perfection" as a call simply to a "wholeness" that imitates God by seeking God's will beyond the written strictures of the Law? Certainly some responsible scholars would argue that Long's version of Matthew tones down Matthew's characteristic ethical radicalism too much and situates Matthew too comfortably on the theological terrain of Protestant Christianity. They find ample reason to take Matthew quite seriously when his Jesus insists that not a dot or a serif will pass away from that law, and that Jesus' disciples are to set their ethical goal at God's perfection. Interpreters who situate Matthew closer to Judaism than to a self-consciously autonomous Christianity will be frustrated by Long's confident exposition of the latter premise.

Still, these are criticisms pertinent only because Long succeeds so admirably in providing a readable, convincing account of Matthew's Gospel. He doesn't foreground vexed exegetical issues, but draws readers into thoughtful engagement with the themes he finds in Matthew—and he does this admirably well. Many Bible study groups, preachers, and interested explorers will thank him for this clear, persuasive guide to the First Gospel.

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Princeton Theological Seminary

Placher, William C., *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking About God Went Wrong*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996. Pp. 222. \$21.00.

William Placher's study of God's transcendence, and our thinking about it, is stimulating both as historical analysis and constructive theology. In *The Domestication of Transcendence*, Placher provokes readers to reconsider critical theological resources while wrestling with the contemporary relevance of their insights into divine transcendence. At his best, Placher weds a dialectic of faithfulness to tradition and contextual intelligibility, which Kathryn Tanner describes on the back cover as "a now-all-too-rare combination of sound historical scholarship and theological creativity."

Placher argues that Christian theology has lost a critical insight that it must recover. Put simply, God is to be conceived as radically transcendent and therefore full of unexpected grace. Transcendence cannot be understood in a “contrastive” sense (utilizing Tanner’s word) so that it opposes immanence, but as a way to indicate God’s ineffability. “What I want to convey—and *transcendence* seemed a relatively modest way of doing it—is this: before the seventeenth century, most Christian theologians were struck by the mystery, the wholly otherness of God, and the inadequacy of any human categories as applied to God.” After that point, Placher asserts, the primary culprit in “the domestication of transcendence” was theologians’ attempt to gain lucid formulations of God’s nature akin to Descartes “clear and distinct” ideas. In the process, theological discourse lost the ability to describe both true mystery and transforming grace.

Placher’s first stop is with three “classical” theologians—Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin—finding that these concurred on at least three essential convictions: Human reason and effort “cannot make it to God”; thus, a relation to God “depends on God’s gracious initiative”; and, finally, knowledge of God is best expressed in trinitarian terms. Placher then moves to the seventeenth century, which detoured from these classic theologians and therefore sought to comprehend God clearly through reason. Consequently, God’s mystery was lost. It sought to specify where grace works and where human beings act. In the process, it lost any sense of the Trinity’s relevance and became fixated on a unitary “God,” creator of the world and of the moral order. Even Pietist, Puritan, and Jansenist thinkers can be faulted for looking away from God’s mystery to subjective experience as a measure of grace.

I can imagine it would be tempting to stop there, caviling against past mistakes and leaving a contemporary response unexpressed. Instead, after restating his argument, Placher attacks two key issues: revelation (how do we know the transcendent God speaks?) and the problem of evil (where does evil fit with God’s transcendence?). Placher works with revelation within the modality of Calvin’s “inner testimony of the Holy Spirit”; with evil, Placher finds that here—if anywhere—clear and distinct ideas about God’s action are impossible.

There is an implicit danger in Placher’s approach that emerges at times: fideism, the lack of warrants for claims to God’s goodness when God is wholly other. Without validation in experience in the world, how do we know that there is any cognitive content to claims about God’s character? Placher seems willing to respond that ultimately we never know because God is transcendent. But that may leave contemporary readers unsatisfied and ultimately

uninterested in this unknowable God. Certainly, he is right that before the seventeenth century, a common belief may have made faith as self-evident as life itself. But we now stand after a great divide, and our century has struggled mightily to reclaim faith. Placher's insistence on past insights tears apart the poles of faithfulness to tradition and intelligibility so that it appears that only a dogged adherence to traditional formulations remains standing.

More positively, I believe that Placher adds a new voice to current conversations about God's relation to the world. If postmodernism has any theological implications, it means moving beyond modern thinking in general and in particular toward a reformulation of the God-world relation. Placher demonstrates that not all old formulations are wrong and that the past in fact has a great deal to teach us.

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Bloesch, Donald G. *Jesus Christ: Savior and Lord*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997. Pp 304. \$22.99.

Jesus Christ: Savior And Lord is the fourth volume of the most ambitious evangelical systematics currently underway. Dedicating his work to P. T. Forsyth, influenced markedly by Karl Barth, and in responsive conversation with Roman Catholic Mariology, Donald Bloesch represents an ecumenical evangelicalism that challenges mainline theology's conventional misreading of evangelical thought. This is especially true of Bloesch's self-identified Reformed and evangelical Catholic perspective.

For Bloesch, however, the ecumenical does not preclude the polemical. "Neo-Protestantism," "neo-Catholicism," and their counterparts in the academy come under sharp attack. He insists that the "battle for Christology" must confront and reject a range of current heterodox views—feminist, pluralist, process, modern, postmodern, anti-supernatural, existentialist, and relativist. But positions on the right are also challenged: fundamentalist, hyper-Calvinist, and traditionalist Christologies that fail to take into account the evangelical essentials. Bloesch expresses the hope that his work will be a resource for theological renewal movements in the churches, committed to those essentials.

Bloesch's Christology, like others in the evangelical stream, incorporates soteriology. Taken up in sequence are the Person, then the Work, both

objective and subjective. The Person of Christ is treated in standard Chalcedonian terms—deity, humanity, unity—interpreted by the full evangelical narrative from virginal conception to ascension, session and return. Of special interest to evangelicals is Bloesch's view that while the virginal conception is an essential truth, grounded in the historical core of a "folkloric" story, a necessary sign that safeguards the paradox, it is "not an essential of faith indispensable for salvation." Affirming the Council of Ephesus on Mary as the Mother of God, Bloesch also urges evangelicals to explore further the privileges of Mary—what "may well be the new frontier in ecumenicity"—always, however, measuring claims by biblical norms.

The Work of Christ centers in the "vicarious substitutionary atonement" with due regard to the supportive role of other biblical images and themes. Purposed from eternity, it is God's own act, the "suffering of God" in the divine-human Person, not the appeasement of God by Jesus. As "the subjective is inseparable from the objective," reconciliation must be personally appropriated, hence the place in a volume on Christology for regeneration, sanctification, and other phases of the *ordo salutis*.

With due appreciation for the solid work of this ecumenical *evangelical*—and our collegiality in the mainline church struggle to retrieve the "foundations"—here are some questions from this evangelical *ecumenical*: While the cross is the centerpoint of the Work of Christ, why not the encompassing framework of the three-fold office (John Calvin and the Reformed tradition's gift to the larger church)? Thus, prophetic, priestly, and royal ministries take account of the contributions and reject the reductionisms of many of the heterodoxies Bloesch rightly challenges. Again, while Bloesch affirms the concern for "social transformation" in the sanctified life, it is limited to the witness of "individual Christians" with no systemic role for the church, the latter an aspect of the "world-formative" Reformed tradition. And on the destiny of the unbeliever: Bloesch (as most evangelicals) rightly questions Barth's construal of faith as *noetic* but not *ontic*, separating justification from personal salvation—Barth's philosophical actualism *cum* divine sovereignty censoring a New Testament refrain. But Bloesch's double destination assurances need to hear from Barth about the freedom of God: While warning us not to make a universal homecoming an article of faith, we are not precluded from holding it—by the trajectory of the Story itself—as an article of hope (see *Church Dogmatics* IV/3/1).

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Isasi-Díaz, Ada María. *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996. Pp. 210. \$16.00.

Mujerista Theology is an excellent introduction to one of the many projects in the Hispanic-Latino theological milieu. Isasi-Díaz, a distinguished member of the Association of Catholic Hispanic Theologians in the United States and professor of theology and ethics at Drew University, effectively communicates the basic theological and ethical tenets of *mujerista* theology. As I read the book, it seemed as if Isasi-Díaz was teaching in the classroom. She writes with clarity and coherence, keeping the reader focused on her arguments.

Mujerista Theology is an introduction to a particular method and praxis of doing theology and ethics. Isasi-Díaz names the daily experience—*lo cotidiano*—of Hispanic-Latina women as the *locus theologicus* for *mujerista* theology. She then uncovers the enriching theological significance of Latina women's experience in the areas of biblical hermeneutics, anthropology, spirituality, liturgy, ecumenics, and ethics.

In her theological construct, Isasi-Díaz is in conversation with different theological disciplines. For instance, *mujerista* theology finds in feminist theologies a source for clarifying its understanding of difference and its ethical proposal of justice. Isasi-Díaz also challenges the role of Scripture, especially among Protestants, as she ascribes a functional-liberative character to the reading of the Bible among Latina women. *Mujerista* theology contributes to liturgical studies as it relocates the experience of the sacred to fit the struggles for liberation and celebrates the ritual and religious creativity of Latina women in the project of liberation for creation.

In her conversation with other theological disciplines, Isasi-Díaz demonstrates the character of *mujerista* theology. First, it affirms its own particularity in the bosom of Latina women's experience. Second, it challenges those theological and ethical positions that claim to be normative at the expense of denying the historical liberation of the oppressed. Third, and last, *mujerista* theology has a pragmatic and existential inclination that allows it to "pick and choose" from the various theological and ethical proposals as long as they serve the project of liberation. In many ways, *mujerista* theology is a *teología mestiza*—a theological mixed breed.

I wish to raise two issues with the author—who is also my colleague and friend. First, I hope that in her future writing Isasi-Díaz grapples with ecclesiology. I am uncertain whether *mujerista* theology assumes an ecclesiology similar to the Base Ecclesial Communities in Latin America and other parts of the world, or whether there is an emerging ecclesiology yet "in the making." The last two chapters of *Mujerista Theology* begin to address this

question; however, I am uncertain how to explain Isasi-Díaz' unsubtle engagement with other theological disciplines and her ambiguous position regarding ecclesiology. Second, I believe that Isasi-Díaz needs to clarify to her audience (presumably uninformed about Hispanic-Latino-Latina issues) the generic term "Latina women." Not all Latina women meet Isasi-Díaz's theological description.

Mujerista Theology should be required reading for any course in theology, and particularly for any course in or of theology in the United States. It is also a wonderful resource for small discussion groups in local congregations. I am sure that the reading of *Mujerista Theology* will create some passionate discussions among students and faculty, church leaders and pastors. Whether the discussions are about methodology or biblical authority, justice and retribution, or experience and orthodoxy, Ada María Isasi-Díaz has done it again! She raises the voice of Latina women in the United States, requiring the reader to do serious theological reflection through another voice in the margins of U.S. society and to hear a cry for liberation for all creation.

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Appleby, R. Scott, ed. *Spokesmen for the Despised: Fundamentalist Leaders of the Middle East*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. Pp. 429. \$55.00/\$19.95.

This scholarly but readable volume is for readers who want to probe the role of radical fundamentalism in promoting political change in the Middle East. It also illustrates how extremist views can neutralize and subdue moderate views. The editor is R. Scott Appleby, no stranger to the study of radical movements. He was coeditor (with Martin Marty) of the Fundamentalism Project. This volume is a valuable addition to that effort.

In this informative collection of essays the authors examine different roles of contemporary militant and extremist leaders as they have pursued religious and political goals on behalf of unrepresented groups in their societies. Their biographies include Muslims, Jews, and one Christian. They are located in five countries ranging from Sudan to Iran. Four chapters deal with specific approaches to Israeli-Palestinian tensions and animosities. Various patterns of leadership are operative among the leaders considered. Each person is described in terms of biographical background and ideological formation. Each biographer has done careful research and has some personal acquaintance with the leader described.

This collection is a valuable contribution to understanding the complex personalities and movements in its purview. It illuminates the dynamism at work in radical religious-political movements in the eastern Mediterranean region. But a dilemma is raised in the reader's mind: How can religious faith undergird and inform a political revolution on behalf of oppressed people without allowing that movement to become an end in itself? In these accounts one finds a variety of outcomes unanticipated by the leadership. This issue of control and direction is not far removed from the practical problem of a pastor or congregation that embarks on a program aimed at social change in a community only to find themselves involved in a political process.

Each of the eight chapters deals at length with a modern interpreter of a religious tradition from an extremist point of view—a fundamentalist—who uses the language of religion to address urgent political issues in his society. He is a person schooled in the religious tenets of a community of faith. Each figure is a man and a patriarch, but an advocate of drastic social change, arguing passionately for the rights of his marginalized people. They include Ayatollah Ruhullah Khomeini, supreme ruler of the Islamic Revolution in Iran; Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, spokesman for Hizbullah in Lebanon; Hassan Turabi, the paramount lay leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Sudan and dominator of political power; Shayk Ahmad Yasin, founder and religious head of the Hamas Movement in the Gaza strip; and Jan Willem van der Hoeven, a Dutch Protestant who is the guiding light of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem.

What do these prominent personalities share in their ways of promoting a variety of fundamentalist options? Their approaches to political issues through the vocabulary and symbolism of particular religious traditions enables them to create compelling arguments and to generate fervor as they address large audiences to advocate drastic social change. The tradition is employed selectively so as to relate ancient words, ideas, and history to current problems and thus to legitimate the speaker's program and point of view. Past history is reinterpreted in such a way as to prove the inevitability and urgency of the revolution. The tradition is artfully employed as a means to give people a sense of communal identity and purpose but also to delineate true believers from the careless, misguided, or apostate crowd. By stating and restating terms over and over again, by promoting catch phrases that are easily remembered, and by excelling in rhetoric and even poetry, these flaming torches ignite their hearers and set them on fire for action. Promises of a better day become goals of programs for social and political change.

Yet these spokesmen are pragmatic politicians who know that success requires accommodation to political realities. Each of the movements described required decision by its leader at more than one stage to modify its stance in response to external conditions. Hizbullah, for example, once it became recognized as a significant force in the Lebanese scene, had to decide whether to promote an Islamic state (as its Iranian revolutionary tutors advised) or to participate in elections for the Lebanese parliament and so become a Lebanese political party (a position favored by its Lebanese leadership). The latter move was adopted with the surprising result that a number of its representatives were elected. But Fadlallah also found a way to justify military action on the border with Israel, and so to satisfy critics that it was still a revolutionary force. Each leader described faced pragmatic decisions at some point, especially when it became necessary to implement ideology in some institutional form if the movement was to survive.

These descriptions and analyses of fundamentalist leaders in the Middle East are highly instructive for the reader who will ponder them. No longer is it easy to dismiss key figures as simply misguided or crazy. Each in his own way has mastered and embodied his religious tradition, become a devout believer, and thereby a zealous defendant of his oppressed people. He has thereby also gained stature and power. When governments have become captive to special interests, the preacher draws a line in the sand and then marshalls forces to retake holy ground. By doing so the spiritual bankruptcy of secular or so-called "democratic" regimes is revealed. As one reflects on the tunnel vision of such radical theocratic movements, persuasive though it may be, there is good reason for the rest of us to reflect on the question, "What is required for *us* to reinterpret Christian theology in terms that are understandable and compelling, and that address fundamental (i.e. root) social issues in our context?"

Benjamin M. Weir
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Allegretti, Joseph G. *The Lawyer's Calling: Christian Faith and Legal Practice*. New York: Paulist, 1996. Pp. 141. \$12.95.

In *The Lawyer's Calling: Christian Faith and Legal Practice*, Joseph G. Allegretti provides a compelling argument for re-envisioning the relationship between professional practice and Christian faith. Allegretti is a professor of legal ethics at Creighton University Law School. But this is not a book about legal ethics in the narrow sense of the term. Codes of professional conduct and the ethical dilemmas arising thereunder are hardly mentioned here. For

Allegretti is convinced that the principal ethical problem facing lawyers is one of character formation or vision and not rule following. Lawyers and the legal profession have lost their way as the connection between their work and their deepest values and commitments has become increasingly attenuated. The sense of meaning and purpose is vanishing from their work as a result. This book is an important first step toward bridging the chasm that separates faith and work for many lawyers.

Allegretti employs H. Richard Niebuhr's well-known typology from *Christ and Culture* as a heuristic tool for discussing the different ways that Christian lawyers understand the relationship between faith and legal practice. He calls his modified version of the typology "Christ and the Code." The Code is described as the "standard vision" that underlies the modern codes of professional ethics regulating lawyer conduct. The standard vision represents the lawyer as the neutral partisan of the client who zealously and competently represents the client without regard to his or her own moral convictions. Those familiar with Niebuhr's typology will anticipate the progression of the argument as well as the four types. Allegretti predictably rejects sectarian, accommodationist, and dualistic interpretations of the relationship between the practice of law and Christian faith. Like most who employ Niebuhr's famous typology, Allegretti is fundamentally committed to the vision of the Transformist Model. According to this model, Christian lawyers should seek to integrate their work and religious faith in such a way that their profession can serve as "an instrument of loving service to God and to neighbor." The underlying assumption of this model is that Christ is Lord over all of life and seeks to transform its every facet and dimension.

There are two meanings of transformation at work in this book: the transformation of the lawyer and the transformation of legal practice and the larger society through the transformed lawyer. The first meaning receives the bulk of the author's attention. Allegretti makes clear that the Transformist Model requires that lawyers undergo a kind of conversion experience that involves confession of failure and acceptance of forgiveness from God. This is a prerequisite for transformation. What is transformed in this process is not necessarily our actions but our vision of the moral universe. Our eyes are opened and our vision slowly clears. We begin to see what remained veiled to us before: The legal profession is indeed a holy calling; our clients are covenant partners with us in a joint enterprise; we are prophets and agents of reconciliation in a world that has lost its moral compass and is badly in need of healing. Allegretti explores and elaborates upon each of these transformations of vision to great advantage.

Allegretti acknowledges that the Transformist Model is vulnerable to the critique of "real world" experience. While Allegretti does not retreat from or sidestep such objections, he wisely does not waste much space defending his position against

the innumerable "what if" scenarios that any lawyer could pose to his thesis. Instead, he continually places before the reader the transformist alternative to the aforementioned "standard vision" of legal practice. Lawyers can aspire to become much more than neutral partisans who zealously represent clients without regard to their own moral convictions. Allegretti has effectively reintroduced a morality of aspiration into legal ethics that is sorely lacking in the modern codes of professional ethics regulating lawyer conduct. As Robert F. Cochran has observed, the drafters of those codes progressively "gave up on defining the good lawyer; they define only the bad lawyer." Allegretti offers here an alternative vision of the good lawyer, one that has its roots deeply embedded in the ideas of vocation and covenant—two themes that are important not just for legal ethics but for any ethic that purports to be Christian.

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McClendon, James W., Jr. *Making Gospel Sense to a Troubled Church*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1995. Pp. 203.

Theologian James W. McClendon, Jr., had not preached on a weekly basis for years when he was abruptly summoned to a year of interim ministry. A disastrous break between the congregation of which he was a part and its pastor left the pulpit empty and parishioners bitter. These twenty-six sermons represent McClendon's pulpit work during that challenging year. Pastors who know what it is like to preach to a wounded congregation will appreciate McClendon's talent for combining simplicity of language, theological depth, and pastoral sensitivity in the pulpit.

McClendon's overall homiletical strategy, described in the book's introduction, was to address the crisis at hand and then move the congregation ahead. The healing of the church, he was convinced, depended on faithful adherence to the three essential "gospel signs": preaching, baptism, and Eucharist. McClendon's intentional weaving together of preaching with the theology and practice of baptism and the Lord's table is strikingly evident throughout the collection.

The sermons are grouped under three headings: "Grief and Forgiveness," "The Recovery of Hope," and "Looking Forward Again." In the first section, McClendon draws biblical texts alongside the immediate past experience of the congregation, inviting congregants to deal with their bitterness and discouragement and to engage in practices of forgiveness and reconciliation. The opening sermon ("After the Funeral"), for example, joins the story of Joseph's confrontation with his brothers in Genesis 50 with Jesus' authorizing

the Church's practices of forgiveness in John 20, evoking the possibility for the congregation to practice forgiveness toward its former pastor. The second set of sermons aims to rehabilitate the congregation's sense of ecclesial identity and vocation. Many a troubled congregation would be helped by a wise theological and historical treatment of baptism like "The Inner Secret of Membership." McClendon manages to avoid a pedantic tone as he describes the historical lapse of baptismal theology and practice (baptism became "a cradle party") and encourages the congregation to rediscover its identity as "the fellowship of the once-buried . . . the company of the resurrection." "The Road to Heaven" sermon images conversion as a journey that leads us again and again to the eucharistic table. The third section of the book seeks to orient the congregation to its future, and begins (characteristically for McClendon) with a sermon on the occasion of a baptism, while the Easter sermon ("Hard-headed Cleopas") leads the congregation to the Emmaus Eucharist.

A helpful feature of the book's format is that McClendon introduces each sermon with remarks about the congregational circumstances at the time the sermon was preached, noting the worship setting and theological aims undergirding the sermon. Reformed readers may on occasion be uncomfortable with McClendon's emphasis on individual, as opposed to corporate, dimensions of faith, piety, and witness; however, readers in McClendon's own Anabaptist tradition may be struck by equally frequent references to the corporate horizon and sacramental structure of the gospel.

McClendon often uses several biblical texts in a single sermon. While this practice can provide a certain hermeneutical richness of texture in a sermon, it can also produce hermeneutical static. Contrast, for example, the "Did Sarah Laugh?" sermon, where two lectionary texts coalesce naturally around the image of the laughing Sarah, with "Finding a Life Worth Living," where the reader is treated to generous helpings of Philemon, 1 Corinthians, and Mark 10. The result, in the latter case, is a blurring of the distinct rhetorics and aims of the separate texts and an overall lack of homiletical focus.

Those familiar with McClendon's theological corpus will appreciate evidence of his "three-stranded" narrative ethics in "When the Fire Burns, Where Is God?" But the voice in these sermons is that of the concerned pastor and fellow pilgrim whose learning enriches rather than intimidates. McClendon's sermons can revive the imagination of preachers about their own congregations as communities of divine mission, as they no doubt revived that of the original hearers.

Sally A. Brown
Lancaster Theological Seminary

Webb-Mitchell, Brett. *Dancing with Disabilities: Opening the Church to All God's Children*. Cleveland: United Church Press, 1996. Pp. 152. \$15.95.

Brian Webb-Mitchell has added another book to his growing corpus of works on disability and the church. *Dancing with Disabilities*, like his earlier work *God Plays Piano Too*, is a collection of essays, articles, and sermons that reflect theologically and pastorally on ministry to the disabled. In *Dancing with Disabilities*, Webb-Mitchell focuses mostly on the mentally disabled. He is to be commended for this, because the most difficult pastoral and theological questions surround ministering to the mentally disabled (for the record, the reviewer is physically disabled with what is called a mobility handicap). The author offers a helpful contribution to the church's growing discussion about how to minister to disabled individuals and the families and communities to which they belong. Because *Dancing with Disabilities* is a collection of shorter works (some of them coauthored with others), it is uneven and at times disconnected. Those who prefer a more systematic approach might turn to *Unexpected Guests at God's Banquet*, which is Webb-Mitchell's attempt at a longer, book-length argument on disabilities.

The main weapons in Webb-Mitchell's arsenal are stories about disabled people—stories about their disabilities, their faith, their witness to Christ, the resistance and acceptance they have found in the church, and God's sustaining presence in their lives. It must be said that Webb-Mitchell employs these stories powerfully. In the course of the book, readers come to know and love a rich cast of characters. Chapter one introduces us to Kevin and Sue, mentally retarded people who participate in the Sunday liturgy in ways that teach us how to be the body of Christ. In chapter three we meet Rachel, a fire-haired girl with both mental and physical disabilities who teaches us how to celebrate the Eucharist. In chapter five we meet Jenny, a girl in an electric blue wheelchair. Chapter eight introduces us to Steve, Randy, Dennis, and Stephanie, children from a psychiatric facility. Chapter ten gives us a tour of a Christian camp in Sweden where disabled and able-bodied children teach each other important faith lessons. In chapter eleven we are led to become part of l'Arche, a community in which people with mental retardation play an important role. Through these stories and many others, Webb-Mitchell argues that in order to be faithful to the gospel of Christ, the church must find more ways to minister to the most severely disabled children of God.

The book consists of far more than simply stories, however. Webb-Mitchell combines these stories with theological reflections in order to teach and challenge. Although Webb-Mitchell does not organize the book systematically, he calls repeatedly on a core set of theological principles. First, he argues that liturgy is

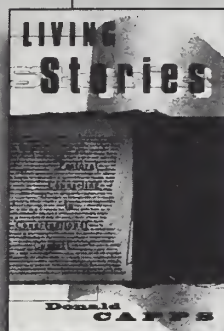
where the church is most fully the church, and no one should be excluded. Second, he believes that the church has been held captive by the Enlightenment view of the human condition, and thus has held the participation of people ransom to their ability to understand. To be human is not to understand, but "to acknowledge our imperfection and vulnerability." Third, the American church has made an idol of the individual; Webb-Mitchell argues for a renewed emphasis on the community. An example of how he deploys these central theological tenets is his argument for inclusion of the mentally retarded in the Eucharist. Mentally disabled people should not be excluded simply because they don't "understand." Since Christianity teaches that to be human is to be fallen and dependent on God Webb-Mitchell concludes that the mentally disabled are neither more nor less dependent on God and thus should participate in the Eucharist. For Webb-Mitchell, the key point is not the understanding of the individual, but the resurrection life of the community.

There are things missing in the book. For example, the problems of architectural barriers, communication barriers, adequate educational resources, and appropriate liturgical resources are not treated. Also, more sustained theological reflection on the topics engaged would have been helpful. Webb-Mitchell's earlier works provide some of these missing pieces, but not all. Still, this book is a blessing to the church, and everyone who reads it will profit.

Rolf A. Jacobson
Princeton Theological Seminary

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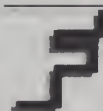
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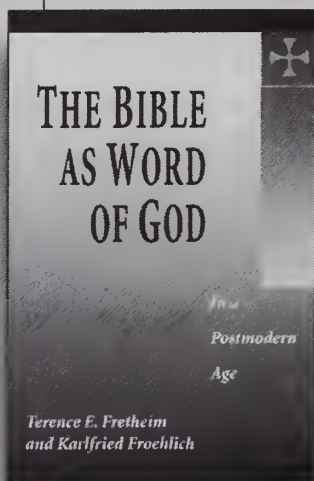
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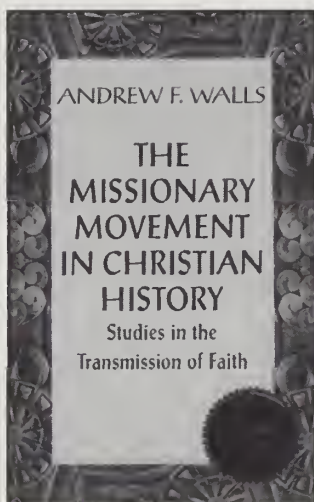
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